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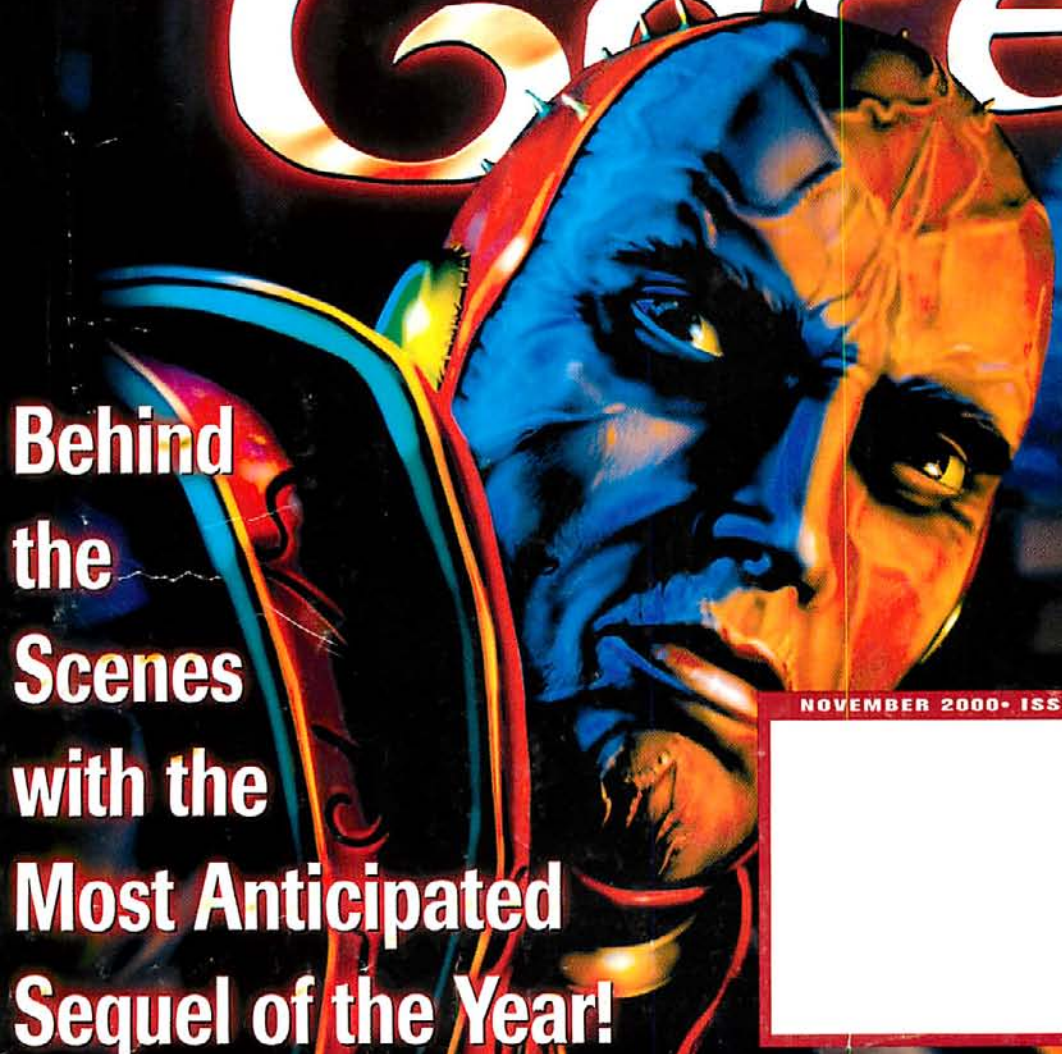
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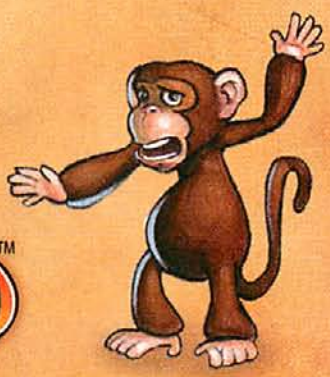
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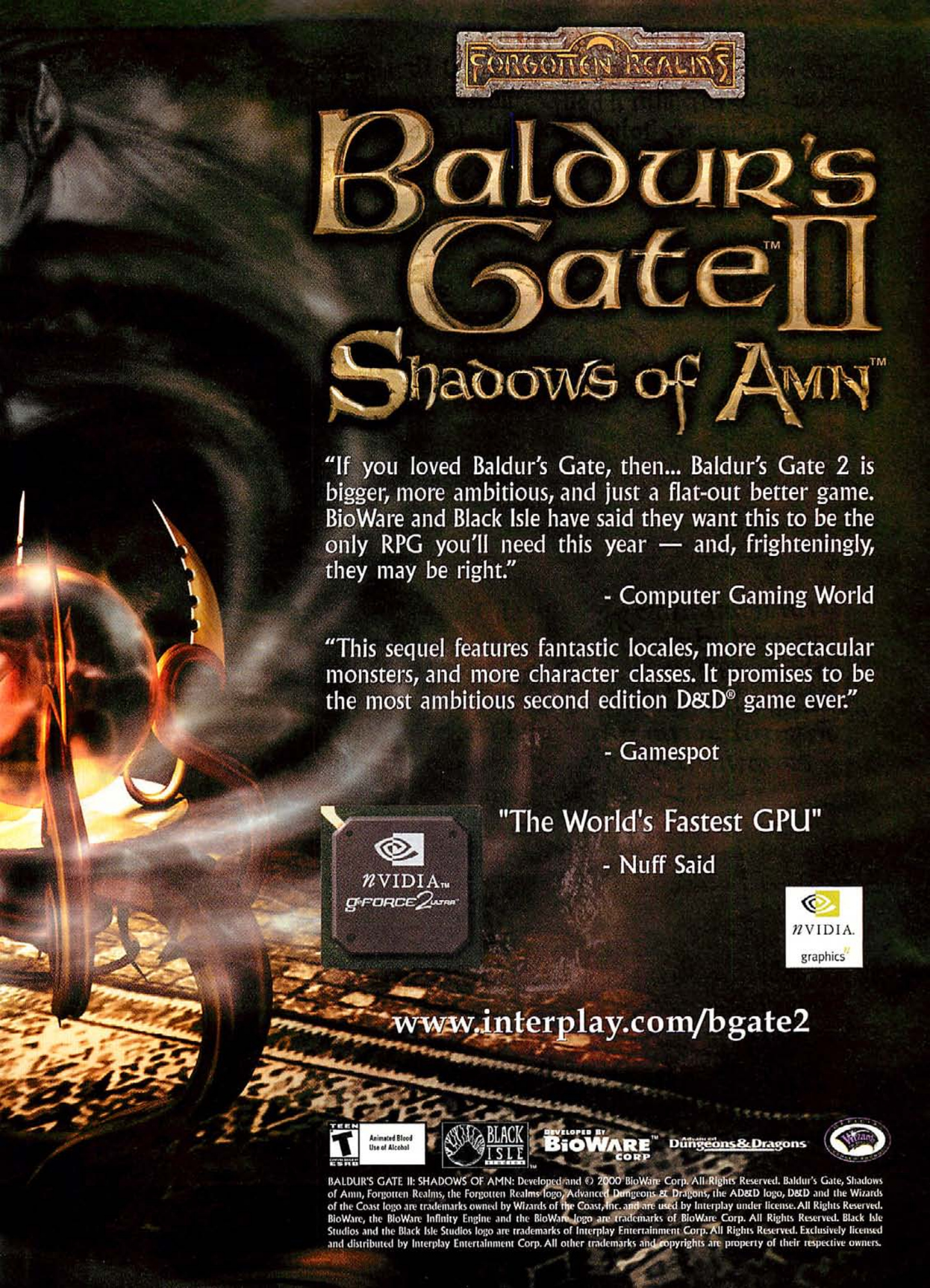
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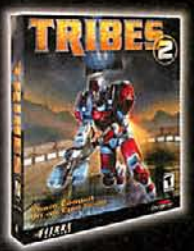
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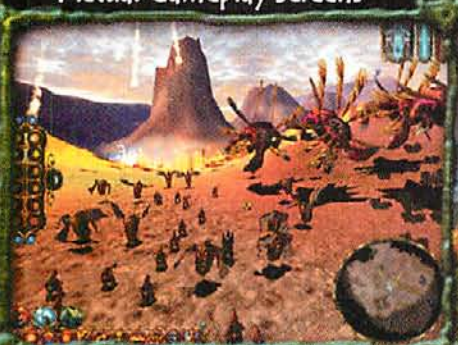






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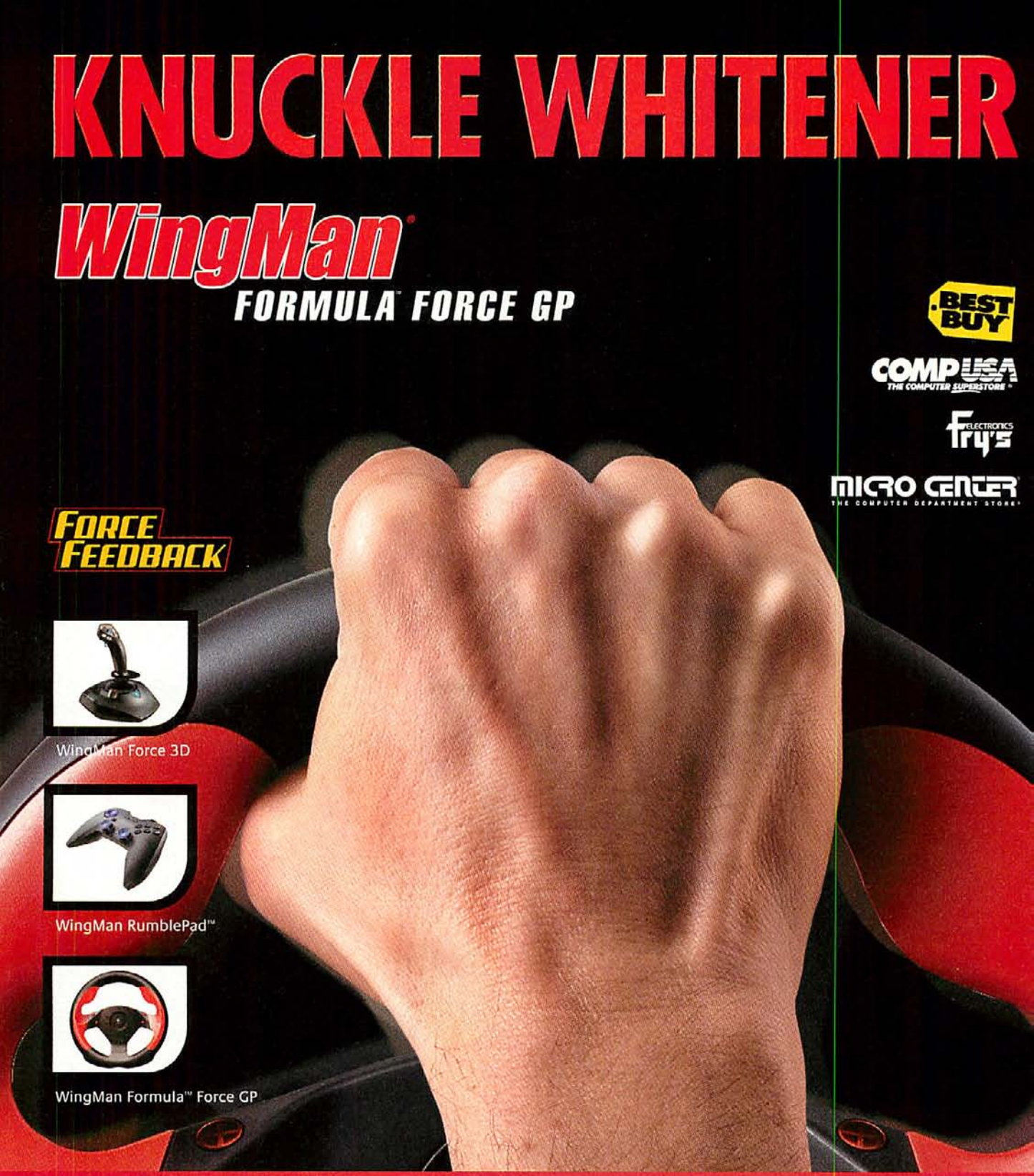

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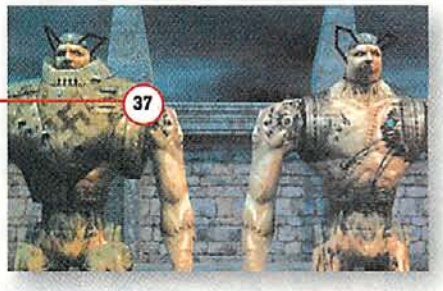
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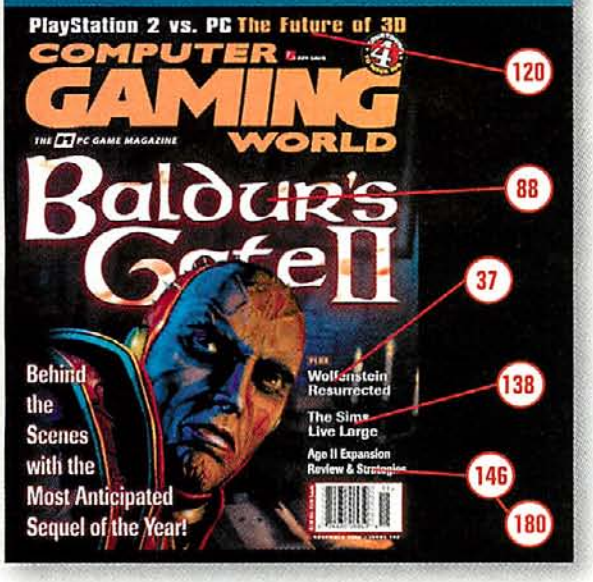
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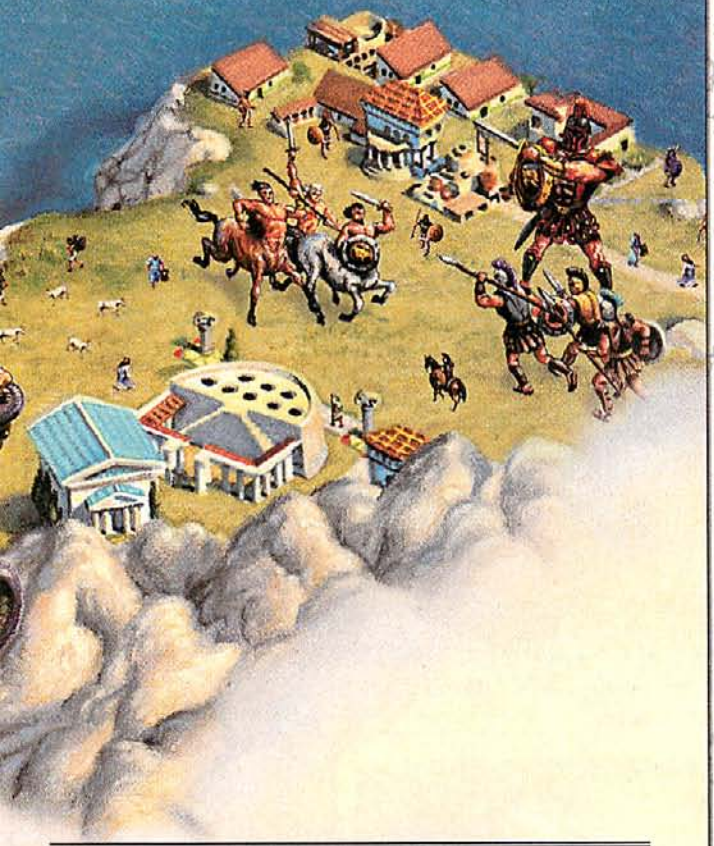






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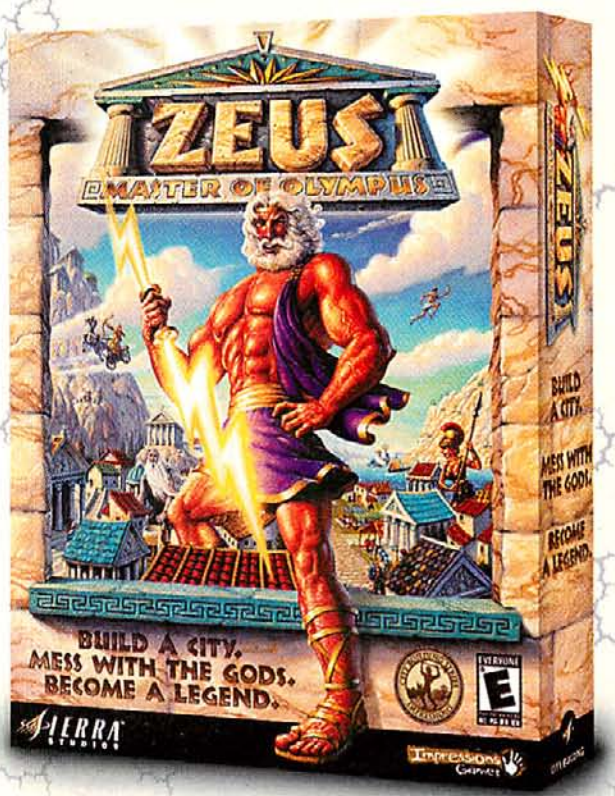
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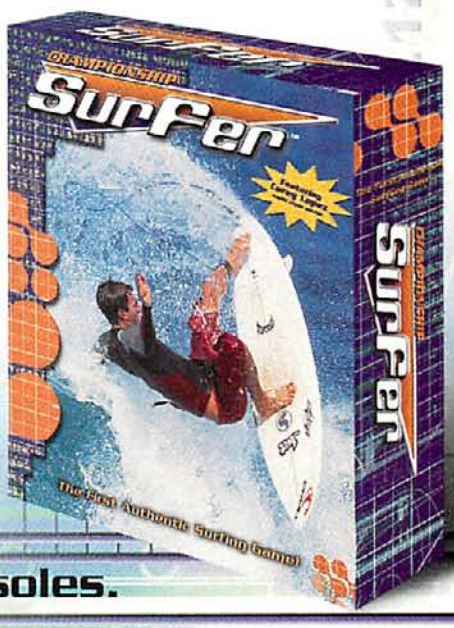
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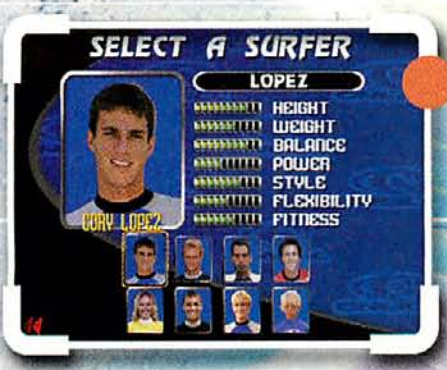
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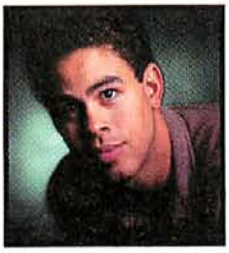
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The Savior of Gaming

Inglewood, California. My hometown has been made infamous by Boyz N the Hood, Grand Canyon, NWA, and Dr. Dre. Former home of the Lakers (and if you're into hockey, the Kings), Inglewood has many facets to its reputation, few of which are positive. But home is home, and I'm proud of it. It's the source of many childhood memories, many of which (not surprisingly), involve computer games; many of which (not surprisingly), are RPGS. In addition to ELITE, ARCHON, ZORK, M.U.L.E., and SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD, I probably played almost 100 different role-playing games. That's what gamers did back then.



For an inner-city kid trying to cope with life in the mid-1980's—with its Cold War tensions, AIDS, the sudden appearance of gangs, and the brutally ugly fashions depicted in classic films like *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*—RPGs were a welcome escape. Their ability to take the imaginative role-playing of *Dungeons & Dragons*, make it digital, and allow us to play by ourselves was the very reason I lobbied for a Commodore 64 in the first place. (Sorry mom, I lied.)

Role-playing is the past, present, and future of PC-based gaming.

My best memory of that time took place somewhere in the middle of Ultima III. A few of my friends, seeing my excitement over this classic game, got hooked as deeply as I did. They sat around and watched me play. They advised me as I made critical decisions. They even took notes and made maps of the game's dungeons.

Of anything Richard Garriott has accomplished, he should be proudest of a single moment in the Jones household: a group of six or seven inner-city black kids sitting around a computer cheering the Avatar on as he completed the final challenge of ULTIMA III.

Such is the power of the role-playing game. To capture the mind. To create powerful attachments and motives for the characters we spend hours inhabiting.

This concept was the driving force behind the early days of computer gaming. Then the category died out, only to be resurrected by companies like Blizzard and Bioware. Particularly Bioware. Through games like BALDUR'S GATE II and NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, these people appear positively determined not to let some of gaming's greatest secrets die.

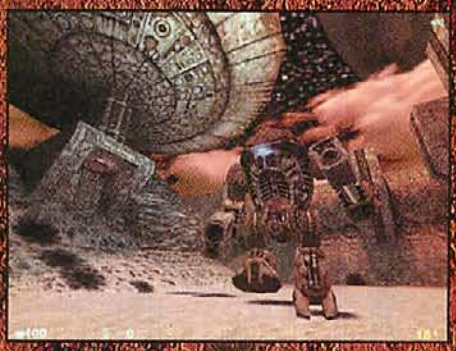
Have no doubt. Role-playing—and I don't strictly mean classic fantasy role-playing—is the past, present, and future of PC-based gaming. Thankfully, some companies still get it.

George Jones

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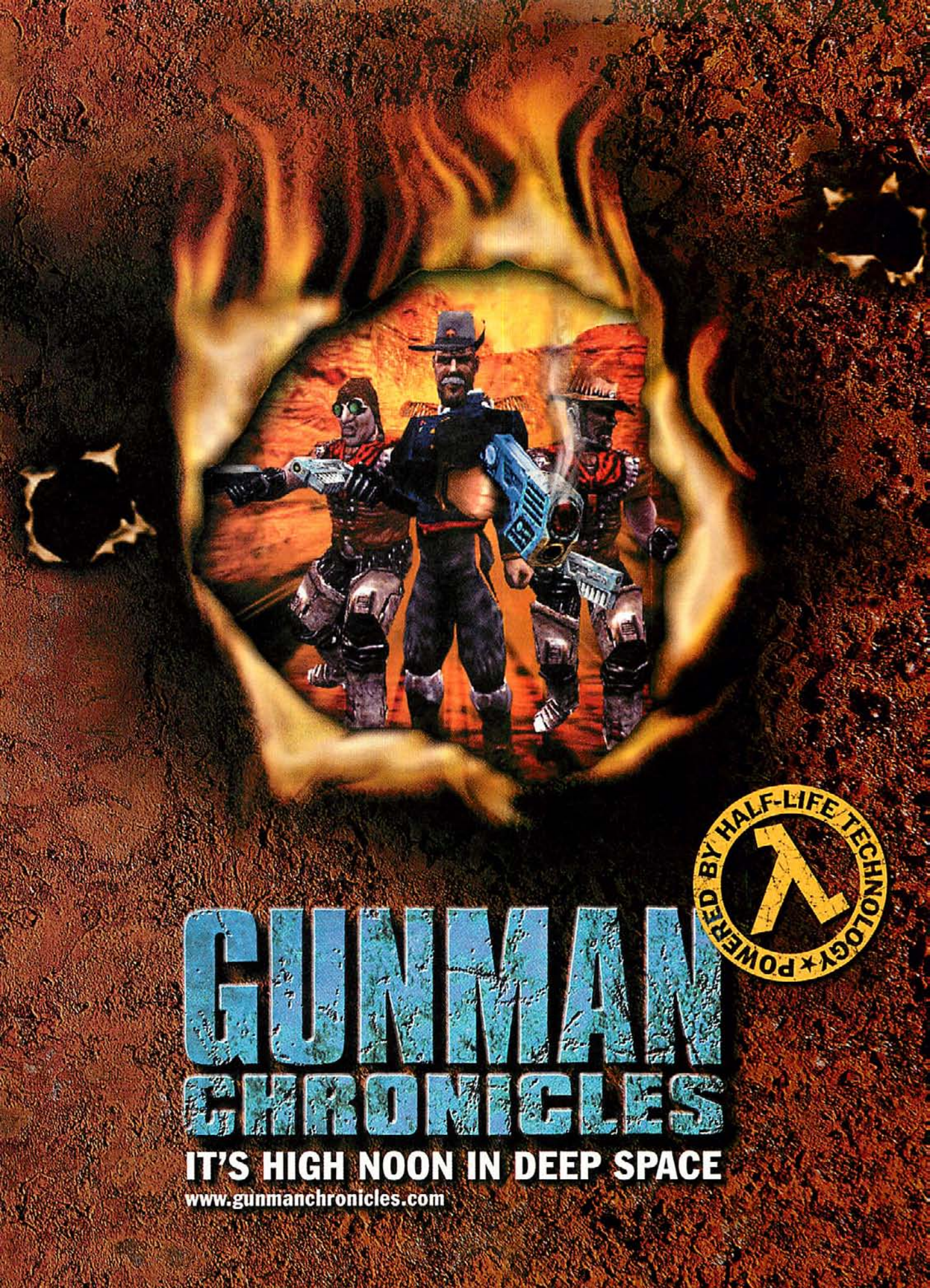
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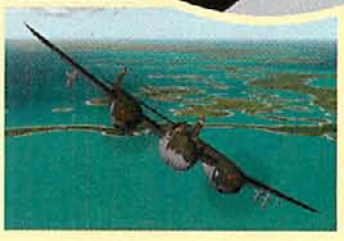
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LETTERS



Cover Carping

What a poor cover on the October issue. What were you thinking? During a time when the hottest topic is the supposed demise of PC gaming, you publish such an ugly cover? I can't see how this is going to help people become and stay interested in PC gaming. How about some cool screenshots or game art instead of poor-quality, comic-strip-style art?

Dirk Swanson

Hey pal, bashing game companies is much more likely to ingratiate yourself to us than CGW-sniping. If you're going to criticize us, try something a little more original than dissing our cover. That is soooo 1990s.

From the Editor

A recent phone conversation with Interplay CEO Brian Fargo revealed an unfortunate error in the September issue of Computer Gaming World. In our review of the company's STAR TREK: KLINGON ACADEMY (#194), the introductory paragraph commented that Interplay had "driven their Trek license into the ground." As Fargo pointed out, the facts indicate otherwise, as we've consistently given Interplay's line of Star Trek games above-average reviews. We sincerely apologize to Brian and Interplay for the offensive oversight.

George Jones
Editor-in-Chief

Survivor Ratings Rant

You guys put out an excellent mag, that is, until the most recent issue (October). When I saw page 104, I was disgusted to say the least. How in the world did you guys come up with the Survivor star- rating system? Clearly, whoever wrote those up was a complete moron.

Rudy is not only the best survivor of the group, he's the greatest survivor of all time! All you needed to do was put Rudy on top (the 5 star rating), and everything would have been perfect. Instead, you opted to put him in last, raising serious questions about your judgment. If Rudy is rated last, how am I supposed to believe any of your reviews? As Rudy would say, "I should come in and kick all your asses."

stony006@juno.com

Favorite Gaming Moment

My favorite moment came when I was playing DAGGERFALL for the first time. It was late at night and I was alone in the basement with the light turned low and game volume turned up. My character was creeping through a particularly dark and dangerous dungeon. A bend in the tunnel was approaching. So I leaned over my desktop with my keyboard in hand and tried to peek around the corner on the computer screen – at that exact moment the 2-liter bottle of Pepsi sitting on the floor next to me issued a loud "pop."

Needless to say, it scared me to death. I dropped the keyboard and went headfirst into the computer monitor. You might say that for that one moment I was totally immersed in my game. Fortunately, I didn't break anything nor have a heart attack as a result of my fright.

I was so impressed with the game that I wrote to the company's technical support and explained what happened. They wrote back the next day informing me that heart attacks and physical injuries were not covered by the warranty, but they were happy I was enjoying it.

Rev. Victor E. Harner
Jarrettsville, Maryland

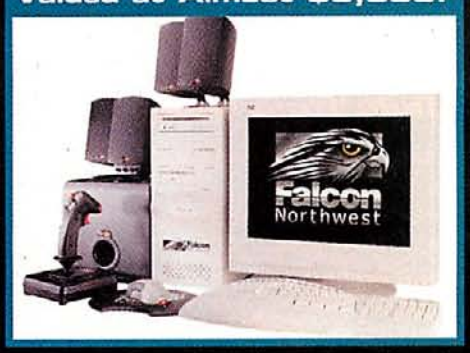
A Call to Arms

Every now and then when I start a new game, I realize that I'm playing something that will revolutionize computer gaming. I had such a realization when I played CIV in the 80's and DOOM in 1994, and I just had that realization again. Big Time Software's COMBAT MISSION: BEYOND OVERLORD is every grognard's dream. I truly believe that COMBAT MISSION will be the game by which all future wargames are measured.

But it's a travesty that many people will not have the opportunity to play it. COMBAT MISSION won't get the exposure it deserves

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Full System Details: AMD Thunderbird 1000Mhz, 256K L2 cache, 512MB SDRAM, ATX Midtower, IBM Deskstar 60GB ATA100 hard drive, Viewsonic PF790 19-inch .25dp 16x12 flat monitor, Hercules 3D Prophet II GTS 64MB GeForce 2, Keytronics 104 Key, Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer Optical mouse, Creative Labs Soundblaster Live! X-Gamer sound card, Klipsch Promedia 400-Watt speakers, 3Com V.90 Hardware PCI V.90 modem, Iomega ZIP 100-meg drive, internal, with one disk, Windows '98 Second Edition Plus on CD, full version, TEAC 1.44mb floppy drive, 300 Watt power supply, 2 extra fans, MSI K7T Pro 6330, 6 PCI, 0 ISA, ATA100 motherboard.

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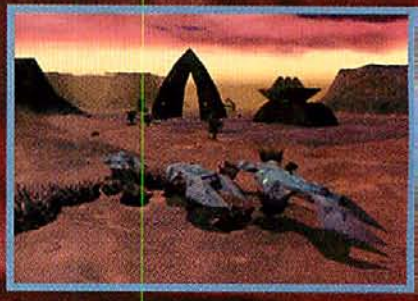
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LETTERS

because the games of small independent publishers, like Big Time, are not stocked by large retail chains.

If we want developers like Big Time to continue to produce high-quality wargames, it's up to us to get the word out. We must fight the major publishers who say wargaming is dead.

Upon our struggle depends the long continuity of our institutions and our identities as wargamers. Is the heir apparent of the original EMPIRE and COMPUTER BISMARK really SONIC THE HEDGEHOG? Can we really expect a PS2 version of SQUAD LEADER? I think not. Let us spread our way of life to new generations of gamers who, until now, have been raised on mass-market titles and console games. Let us brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that, if PC wargamers last for a thousand years, men will say, this was their finest hour.

Michael Hawash

Better Than Swimmin' With Women

My dream from this day on is to work for your magazine. You guys seem to have huge amounts of fun doing something you love and actually make money, too...lucky monkeys!! It's unbelievable – the only job that might be slightly better is marrying rich wives, then mysteriously removing the pool ladder while they're out for a swim (a la THE SIMS). Promise me a job when I get outta high school, okay?

Alex Huth

Bring us six very rich women who love to swim, and you've got a deal, kid. And one rich bachelor. Make that two rich bachelors, one of whom likes RPGs, walking in the rain, piña coladas, and humorists in tights.

CGW: 4 Stars

I have been a subscriber for the past two years. If I rated your magazine according to your review style, I would give it four stars. The Pros are fantasic articles on future games, updated information on the gaming world, and a great layout. As for the Cons, there is only one, your reviews should be called "postviews."

A published review is supposed to provide information in a timely fashion. Under normal circumstances, when the review is published for a movie or book, it is around the time the movie has opened or before the book has published. But, in your case, most of your reviews are published long after the game has been out. Is this the fault of the game companies, your reviewers, or what?

Bernard E. Cana

One of the downsides of print is the long lead time. We'd love to compress it (as long as it didn't entail working harder), but there are several reasons why we can't:

We require our reviewers to finish the game. For the average game, that's about two weeks. It takes another week to edit, lay out, proof, and transmit files to the printer; another week to print and bind. Magazine distributors take three weeks to deliver to stores nationwide. All tolled, that's two months, but since the rare game coincides with our schedule, it's usually two and a half months. So how does Time do it? They print at different printers throughout the country, and pay a fortune.

All we can say is, the best games will still be available after you've read our review. If you can't buy a game after reading about it in CGW, you wouldn't want it anyway.

The Xbox Question

We received dozens of letters responding to our question about Xbox. Almost unanimously, you told us not to cover it. However, you are interested in reading about Xbox games that are also coming out on the PC. Here's a sampling of your letters:

I don't like playing games on the TV. Nor do I like using a gamepad or sitting on a sofa while I play games. Nor do I like the generally similar qualities of console games, which are predominantly arcade ripoffs.

Computers have been and will be the best platform to play games on. The very best console doesn't even come close to matching the performance of a top-notch computer gaming system. I'll buy a console if and when I can get games like DIABLO 2, UNREAL TOURNAMENT and AGE OF KINGS with better performance and better prices.

James Bufkin

I am never going to switch to consoles. What I love about PCs is the endless customizing, tweaking, and upgrading that consoles will never deliver. The feel of an ergonomic keyboard under my wrist, the mouse that seems to have become part of my hand, the overall "feel" of the PC is something consoles will never give me. In the console world, there is no friendly community that interacts every day and

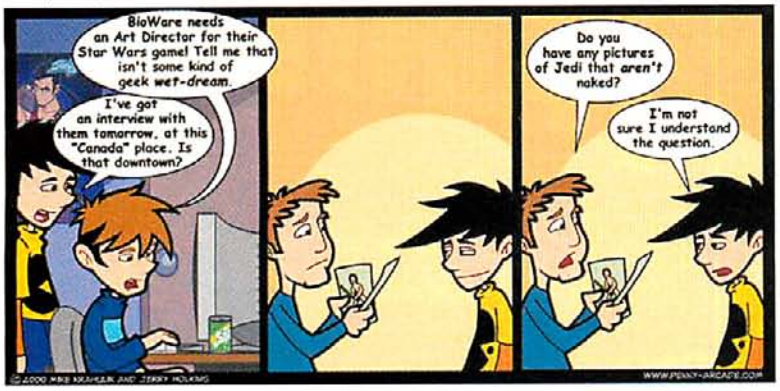
COUNTDOWN 4 TO ISSUE 200

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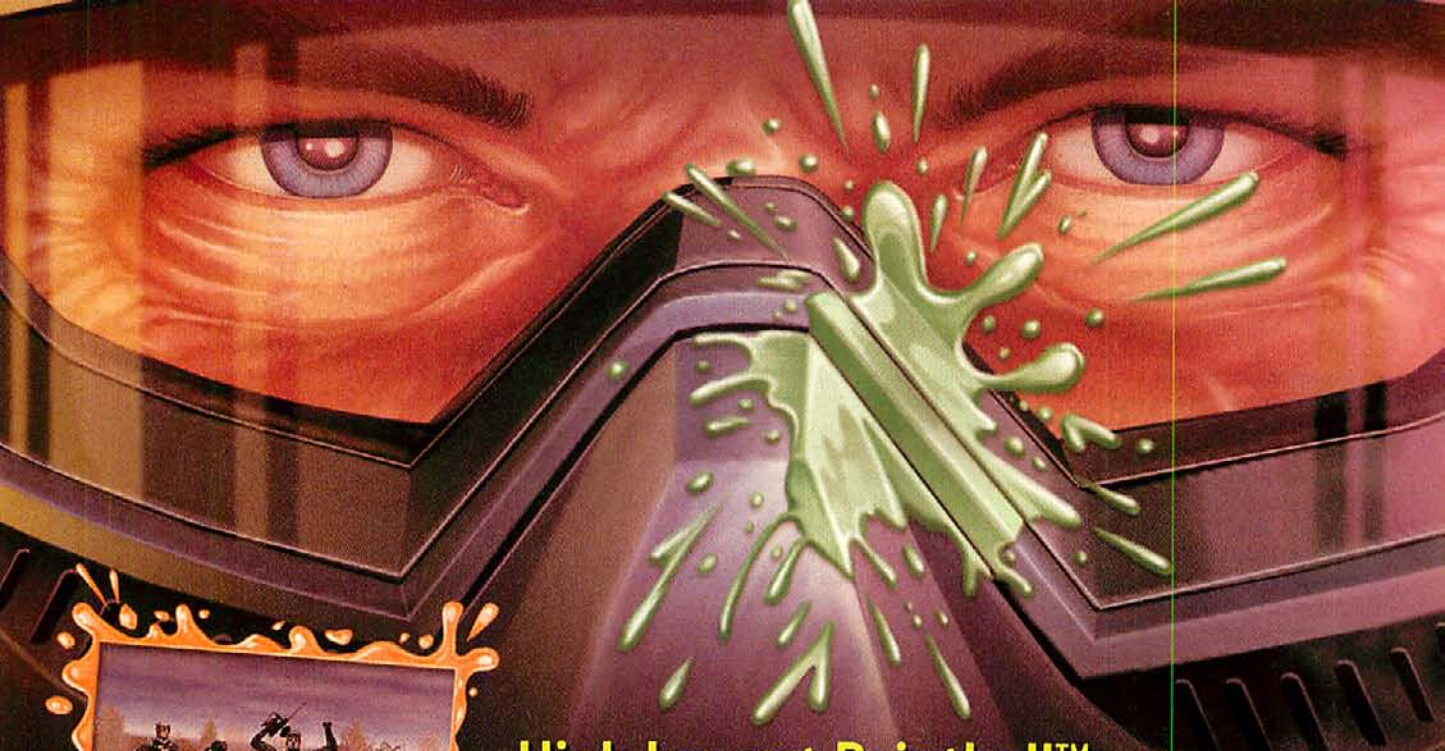
Your Favorite Gaming Moment

What's your favorite gaming moment? As part of our countdown to Issue 200, we're inviting everyone to submit their wildest gaming experience in 200 words or less. We'll collect the most interesting stories and print them in a special section in the March issue. Here's your chance to be a part of gaming history. Write us at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

CGW proudly welcomes Tycho, Gabe, Chuck, and the other wacky characters of The Penny Arcade.



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LETTERS

there are not a million fan sites. Even if consoles offer Internet connections, any user who has practicality in mind would log on to the Internet with his PC and check out the sites. It would break my heart to see you guys start covering the Xbox in great detail. Sure, go ahead and cover the games that come for XBox and PC, but please, don't cover the Xbox in too great of detail.

Steve "DLerium" Tu

Amen, brother. We read you loud and clear.

Windows 2000

I don't see why everyone says that Windows 2000 is bad for gaming. Sure, there are a few older games that simply won't run on it like RED ALERT or FINAL FANTASY VII, but most run fine. More than fine, in fact. All my games run at the same level of performance or better under Windows 2000 than under Windows 98 SE. All Blizzard games, from the original DIABLO to STARCRAFT to DIABLO 2, run perfectly under Windows 2000. I can run UNREAL TOURNAMENT and QUAKE III in 1024x768 resolution using 32-bit color perfectly. If Windows ME truly is the last OS based on the Windows 9x kernel, then Windows 2000 is the way to go.

Ian Matthews

Most of the gaming media, CGW included, cautioned gamers on Windows 2000 because of its problems with legacy games. We've found fewer problems running legacy titles under Windows ME, which seems to offer features that are better suited to gamers' needs. See our hands-on look at ME this month, and watch for our full review in December.

Eskimo Pie in the Face

After digging my way out of my snowed-in igloo up here in the frozen north, the dog-sled-riding mailman handed me the latest copy of *CGW*. After perusing the good stuff (i.e. Greenspeak), I grudgingly flipped to Read.me. I couldn't help but laugh as I read, "We still can't understand Canada's idiotic labeling of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE as an 'adult film.' In doing so, Canada effectively banned it...." I thought that was a tad strange, because SOF is still available at all the local computer stores.

You see, only British Columbia has categorized SOF with adult films. B.C. is but one province of Canada, and their provincial rulings do not affect the rest of Canada. I figured that you guys were probably just drunk on beer when you wrote that, but then I remembered that American beer is so heavily watered-down that a fruitfly wouldn't get a buzz after consuming a six-pack. What's that all aboot, eh?

Tim Harcoff
Ottawa, Ontario

It was tough making out your carving in the birch bark until we hosed the smoke off it, but it appears you have a point. We hope the mushers can get word to you that we send our greetings to you and your tribe. We're really impressed that you can keep your PC running on sperm whale oil and coal. You cavemen are tops, eh!

Department of Corrections

The September issue's Killer Rigs erroneously listed the ASUS K7V motherboard along with AMD's Duron CPU. There's just one small problem: The motherboard is Slot A, but the CPU is Socket A. In other words, they're incompatible. The motherboard you'll actually want is ASUS' A7V, which uses Via's KT-133 chipset, and also uses Socket A, so it accepts both Duron and the new Thunderbird Athlons (with onboard Level 2 cache). We also switched the L1 and L2 cache sizes on Duron. The actual cache sizes are 128KB for the L1 and 64KB for the L2. Technical Director Dave Salvator has spent two weeks wiring Alcatraz for Internet connectivity as penance for his mistake. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

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PC Killer?

Don't believe the hype. Here's how the PlayStation 2 stacks up with our beige beasts

■■■ Later this month, on October 26, the Sony juggernaut will release the PlayStation 2 with the marketing equivalent of a firebombing run over North America. The consumer electronics giant will release upwards of 2,000,000 units in what promises to be one of the largest launches of any consumer device in the nation's history. Sony is hoping to whip up enough hysteria to prompt a feeding frenzy for the new system. Given estimated sales of 75 million units in the U.S., it's easy to see how people like Sony Executive Phil Harrison can buy into their own hype. But we all know (at least those outside of Sony) that the PlayStation 2 isn't going to make the PC obsolete.

In fact, strictly from a gaming perspective, the PC is much better prepared to weather the PS 2 tsunami than most people think. Why? To begin with, even at PlayStation 2's launch, the PC's 3D graphics capability will outpace it, and unlike game consoles, the PC is an ever-evolving beast whose power is constantly increasing. In a recent *CGW* interview, 3dfx's Chief Technology Officer Scott Sellers made this observation

CONTINUED ON PAGE 41

How They Stack Up

Both platforms tout monstrous performance, but on closer examination you'll see that the PC is still ahead of PS2 in nearly every area – except, of course, price.

	PlayStation 2	New Gaming PC	The Edge
CPU	300MHz MIPS	1.4GHz Pentium-IV or Athlon	PC CPUs are well ahead on clock rate and overall processing horsepower
Total Memory	38MB (32MB system, 2MB audio, 4MB video)	196MB (128MB system, 64MB 3D card)	New PS 2 has more overall memory, but still trails the PC
Video Memory	4MB	64MB	PlayStation 2 has only 4MB of video memory, which limits resolution and the ability to do full-scene anti-aliasing
Peak Polygon Rate	66 million polygons/second	30 million polygons/second	Under ideal circumstances, the PS 2 can draw polygons faster than a PC, but it is a bit misleading (see Sustained Polygon Rate)
Sustained polygon rate (full features)	20 million polygons/sec	25 millions polygons/sec	When you crank up all the rendering features, and measure over time, the playing field levels out
Pixel Fill Rate with 2 textures*	0.6Gigapixels/sec	1Gigapixel/sec	PC 3D cards are designed to handle multi-texturing effects, so the latest cards can easily outperform the PS 2
Full-Scene Anti-Aliasing	No	Yes	PlayStation 2 can't really do it because of the performance hit and the limited amount of video memory
Maximum Resolution (double-buffered with 32-bit Z-buffer)	640x480	2000x1500	PS2's resolution is limited by its video memory and TV resolution
Storage Medium	4X DVD, 8MB memory card	4X DVD, 40GB hard drive	PCs still have tons more persistent storage, though in theory you could slap a hard drive onto a PS2 using FireWire
Price	$300	$3,000	Okay, you got us there. Performance never comes cheap.

**Pixel fill rate describes the number of pixels per second that can be blasted onto the triangles in a 3D scene (600 million for PS 2, 1 billion for PC). Higher fill-rates translate into better performance, including higher frame-rates at higher resolutions.*

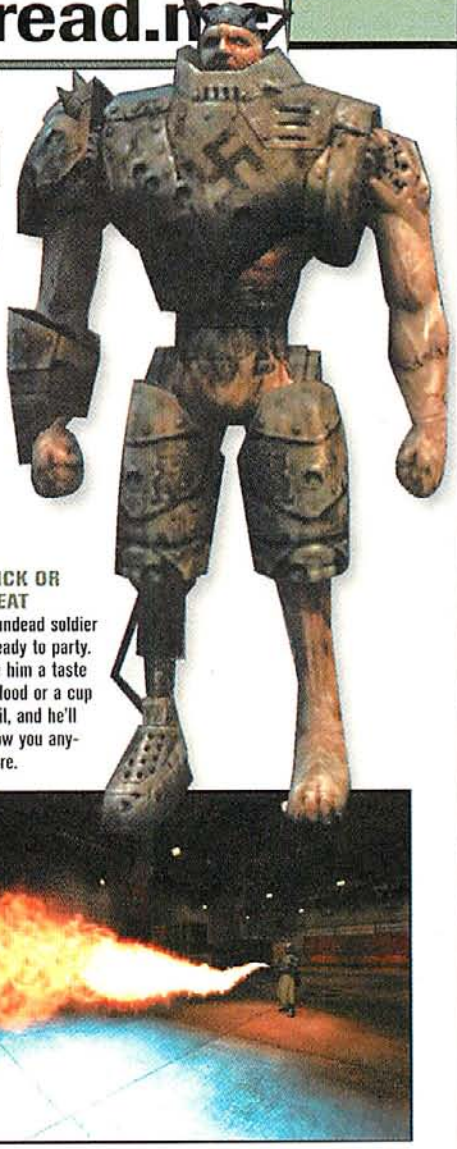
Wrecking the Reich

Is RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN the best thing since HALF-LIFE?

■■■ In a man's man's man's world, there is one man who is The Man, and that man, the original one-man wrecking crew, is B.J. Blaskowitz, the Nazi-gibbing, Himmler-hammerin,' war machine and father of all first-person shooters. And judging from our recent visit to Wolf-developer Gray Matter Studios, this game is the likely successor to HALF-LIFE's single-player shooter crown.

Graphically the game is amazing, with incredibly detailed, almost tactile textures—small surprise, since most of the textures are based on digital photographs team members took of actual castles and cobblestones during what was undoubtedly the most oddly-documented European vacation ever. But QUAKE III-powered graphics will only get you so far: We were blown away moreover by the thundering action of the game. From the heart-stopping chaos of the opening beach invasion, to the terror of the Nazi's secret occult/genetic labs, RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN seems to promise the kind of riveting, single-player action we haven't seen since HALF-LIFE hijacked our lives two years ago. The game's best feature? The fact that Gray Matter is both receiving guidance from WOLFENSTEIN 3D developer id Software, and being given all the time they need by Activision to get the game right. It looks amazing already and should be incredible when it ships sometime next year.

Trust us: You'll want to reserve space on your hard drive today for this thriller. While you're at it, reserve time next month to read our exclusive in-depth preview of this blockbuster-in-the-making. —*Robert Coffey*



TRICK OR TREAT An undead soldier is ready to party. Give him a taste of blood or a cup of oil, and he'll follow you anywhere.

NEED A LIGHT? The developers of RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN know how to melt gamers' hearts.

Reality Check

And the Winner Is... COMBAT MISSION, demonstrating both that wargaming is alive, and that the little guy can sometimes surprise you. Note the overall high marks for most of the games here (except, of course, DAIKATANA). We seem to be alone in thinking VAMPIRE bit, but we'll admit that the patch makes it much more worthwhile (see related story on page 49). This month, we welcome Gamepower.com to the spot previously occupied by *PC Games, PC Accelerator, Incite,* and Gamers.com. May you fare better than they did.

	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamepower.com	Gamespot	Gamecenter	Average
Combat Mission	A+	A	A+	*	A	B-	A
Deus Ex	B-	A	A	B	B+	B+	B+
Vampire: The Masquerade—Redemption	D-	B	B+	A-	C+	B-	C+
MDK 2	A	A-	B+	A+	B	B+	A-
Allegiance	A	A	A	*	A-	A	A-
Daikatana	D-	C-	D-	D-	D+	D-	D-
Diablo II	A	A	B+	A-	A-	B+	A-
Shogun: Total War	A	B+	B+	B	A-	B+	B+
Motocross Madness 2	A	A-	A	B	A-	B-	B+
Ground Control	B+	A-	A	A-	A-	A	A-

*** indicates game has not been rated**

The GOOD...

FREE MULTIPLAYER ADD-ONS



Three cheers for Sierra and Ritual Entertainment, which are releasing free multiplayer add-ons to SWAT 3 and HEAVY METAL FAKK 2, respectively. Both should be out in October. If coding and playbalancing multiplayer will add months to the development time, we think this is a good compromise. Let's hope Bungie and MicroProse do the same thing with ONI and B-17.

The BAD...

RPG MADNESS



It never fails: A landmark game makes a fortune (DIABLO), and a dozen spring up in hot pursuit. How the hell can an RPGer play everything that's coming out? First, BALDUR'S GATE II will take at least 250 hours to get through. That's *three* hours a day for *three* months. Then there's ARCANUM, POOL OF RADIANCE 2, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, and an ICEWIND DALE expansion. We haven't finished all the races in DIABLO II, and there's an expansion of that coming out as well. What'sa geek to do?

and the UGLY

DEATH OF SMURFS



A New York lawsuit brought by former volunteers at America Online could have nasty implications for online games. The volunteers claim AOL should have paid them minimum wage for creating and moderating online content. Origin Systems has already revoked free account privileges for volunteers of ULTIMA ONLINE (known as smurfs). EVERQUEST and ASHERON'S CALL use hundreds of volunteers—let's hope one group of "volunteers" doesn't poison the water for everyone.


this_isn't
code
it's_a
message
<they're_out there. so_are we.>

Mad Men in Milwaukee

25,000 gamers cross swords at Gen Con 2000

In Daniel Pinkwater's *Fat Men From Space*, an army of polyester-suited fat men invade the planet and attempt to deplete the Earth's supply of fast food. Milwaukee suffered a similar invasion in August when more than 25,000 gaming fanatics—some fat, some thin, but all hungry for fun—descended upon the city for Gen Con 2000, depleting Milwaukee of hotel rooms, bratwurst, and polyhedral dice.

Gen Con, hosted by Wizards of the Coast, has grown to embrace all types of games—from traditional board games, to computer games, *Magic: the Gathering*, and role-playing. The big news this year was the newly released Third-Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* rules, which are much more intuitive.

Wizards of the Coast also announced that they are licensing the editor from ARCANUM for their upcoming Master Tools. Players will be able to use the editor to create printable maps for their *D&D* pen-and-paper campaigns.

Plenty of PC gaming companies displayed their best upcoming titles. Mattel Interactive showed POOL OF RADIANCE, the first RPG to use the new Third-Edition rules. "Third Edition has made the game more straightforward and heroic," according to Producer Jon Kromrey. "There are no class and racial restrictions."

Hasbro Interactive had STARSHIP TROOPERS, the MAJESTY expansion, SQUAD LEADER, and BATTLESHIP at the show. Troopers has made big, jump-jet-aided strides since E3. Sierra's ARCANUM was popular as players examined the detailed character-creation system. THRONE OF DARKNESS also drew a crowd (see our preview in this issue). Novalogic ran a 32-player LAN for TACHYON tournaments, and when there wasn't an official game going, players swarmed over it to play DIABLO 2, EVERQUEST, and COUNTERSTRIKE.

Microsoft displayed CONQUEST, MECHCOMMANDER 2, CRIMSON SKIES, MECHWARRIOR 4, and AGE II: THE CONQUERORS expansion. MECHCOMMANDER 2 looks like it will be the mech's meow. CRIMSON SKIES now lets you design your own planes—I'm putting big freaking cannons all over mine. HQ was showing SUMMONER on the PS2. It looked good, but no better than recent PC games like FAKK 2. Gamepad? You'll have to pry the mouse from my cold, stiff hand.

Activision drew a crowd to see RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN. They also showed WIZARDS AND WARRIORS, CALL TO POWER II, and a couple of *Trek* games—AWAY TEAM and ELITE FORCE; the latter looks fantastic. I was also impressed with the Gathering of Developers' RUNE, which is a gorgeous, crazed-viking-beats-the-hell-out-of-everything action rampage. Oh, and mead restores health. Yes!

Gen Con odds/ends: Look for an AGE OF EMPIRES collectible card game soon from Journeyman Press. For free online graphical roleplaying, try **www.cybertown.com** and the open beta of **www.rubiesofeventide.com**. If you want pen-and-paper RPGs on CD with music and search capability, check out**www.conceptsyndicate-.com**. Want to play pen-and-paper RPGs over the Internet with long-distance friends? GRIP at **www.rpgrealms.com** is nifty.
—Mark Asher



DON'T CALL ORKIN The unit and weapon animations in **STARSHIP TROOPERS** look compelling. The game supports transform and lighting features of Nvidia's GeForce cards.



"Help me get this out of my head!"



HOTSHOT POOL OF RADIANCE II boasts beautifully detailed characters and great spell animations. New 3rd-Edition ***D&D*** characters include Barbarians, Monks, Paladins, and Half-Orcs.

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BURNER PlayStation 2 games like GT 2000 are looking good, but aliasing problems (jaggies) will detract from the experience.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

about Xbox that also applies to the PS2. "As with any console, Xbox is a snapshot of a technology at a given point in time, and two years from now, Xbox is going to look very antiquated in terms of features and capabilities and performance."

In addition, Sony's decision to include only 4MB of video memory in the PlayStation 2 may come back to haunt them. This presents challenges to multi-platform developers, because PC 3D cards will have



SHOW OF FORCE NASCAR 4 will run at very high resolutions with full-scene anti-aliasing on the PC, so image fidelity will be superb.

32 or 64MB of onboard memory. One such developer is Electronic Arts' Tony Lupidi, who is working on THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH for both the PS 2 and the PC. He notes that "the PC has far more texture memory and can push fewer polygons. Conversely, the PlayStation 2 has less VRAM but can render more polygons." He also states that "it is more challenging to make computer graphics for NTSC [TV] versus VGA [PC]. The filtering on PC hardware is much smoother than on the PS 2, so we have to do more texture and lighting tuning to make the final scene look good and to reduce NTSC-related artifacts."

Of course, the PlayStation 2 has several undeniable advantages, including fast boot-up times, DVD playback, and zero compatibility problems. You'll never have to download a new graphics driver or tweak your settings to get a game to run. It also costs about one-tenth that of a new, top-of-the-line PC.

But the very nature of a closed architecture system is a liability, which is clear when you load a new game like MADDEN 2001 into a PlayStation. The crisp graphics on the PC become blocky and pixelated on the old console. Five years from now, when we load games on PlayStation 2, Xbox, or the Nintendo Game Cube, they'll look as obsolete next to the latest PC title as PlayStation games look now. —Dave Salvator

WHAT THEY SAY:

"The launch of PS2 is the beginning of the end of the PC as we know it."
–Phil Harrison, Sony

"There are some sticking points with the graphics [on the PlayStation 2] that are just really, really unfortunate. We could do a cut-down version [of our next game] that will run on the PlayStation 2, but it won't have the incredible next-generation graphics that we're going to see on the next generation of PC chips."
–John Carmack, id Software, interviewed on c|net

Of the *CGW* subscribers who say they are likely to buy a video game console, 80 percent plan to buy a PlayStation 2.
–*CGW* survey

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

November 1985

The Future of Gaming as seen from 15 years ago:
"Games will be written by not one inspired programmer but by the collective effort of a team of writers, designers, and programmers. Mixing text, ultra-high resolution graphics, and multiple windows, these games will feature sophisticated, full-sentence parsers and employ a full range of appropriate sound effects, flicker-free animation, and three-dimensional perspective." Grandpa, what's a full-sentence parser?



10

November 1990

This was the first issue of *CGW* to offer in-depth coverage of console games. And the last. The reader response was so hostile, you'd think we shipped each issue with a strangled puppy. With the next generation of consoles coming around, the question arises again: Should *CGW* cover console games? Let us know what you think.



5

November 1995

Man, was this a boring issue. The gaming well was so dry (clogged by crappy "multimedia" titles and sloppy Win 95 adaptations), we ran a massive roundup of hard drives, a feature on chess games, and an article on how to upgrade your OS. If it weren't for the 20 pages of porn ads in the back, this issue would have been a total loss.





A License to Kill

Will the new crop of movie-based games be any better than what's come before?

by Mark Asher



Game	The Pitch	Action!	Cut!	The Lowdown
 **Obi-Wan** (LucasArts) *ETA: Q3 00*	Play as Obi-Wan and fight through a dozen levels using the Force and your light saber to finally duel Darth Maul.	Cool motion-capture animation for the saber duels allows Obi-Wan to flip, roll, and jump during his battles.	The "Glyph System" relies on mouse movements to make light saber attacks, and may be difficult to master.	**Thumbs up.** Cool third-person graphics and an interesting combat system wrapped up in a *Star Wars* license. Not even Jar Jar could mess this up.
 **Planet of the Apes** (Fox Interactive) *ETA: Q1 01*	You're the only human survivor of a spaceship crash. Explore 15 levels and more than 70 sub-levels while fighting bats, rats, and hyenas. Solve puzzles. Hear over 2000 lines of dialogue.	Motion-capture graphics for movement and facial expressions, and a stealth mode for sneaking around.	Looks to be more of a puzzle game than anything else, and not a very good one.	**Thumbs down.** We already know the ending, and apes are about as menacing as circus clowns. You'll want to keep your hands off these damn dirty apes.
 **Evil Dead** (THQ and Heavy Iron Studios) *ETA: Q3 00*	Strap on a chainsaw and get to work. You're Ash, and there are hordes of creatures to kill. Go get some.	Taunt the creatures with Bruce Campbell voiceover work.	You run around and kill things, and that's about it.	**Thumbs down.** Try watching *Evil Dead* 10 times in a row. Mindless violence and clever quips work for about two hours, tops. Give us an *Armies of Darkness* game instead.
 **Starship Troopers** (Hasbro Interactive/Blue Tongue) *ETA: Q3 00*	The bugs attack, and we send our best exterminators in powered armor to fight back in a game based on Heinlein's classic novel and the movie.	Great engine really looks cinematic; powered armor; and MYTH-like gameplay.	Puzzle-based missions and no resource gathering.	**Thumbs up.** It looks cool, the squad-level AI seems up to snuff, and we finally get powered armor.
 **Soldier** (South Peak and Sinister Games) *ETA: Q3 00*	You're an out-of-date killing machine abandoned on a backwater planet. Just when you get used to the peace, aliens attack your colony.	Top-shelf graphics and over-the-top action.	Aggressive system requirements and repetitive gameplay.	**Thumbs down.** Kurt Russell couldn't save the movie, and great graphics can't save this game. Besides, you're named Todd. That's a plumber, not a deadly cyborg.
 **The World Is Not Enough** (Electronic Arts) *ETA: Q1 01*	You're James Bond playing through the events seen in the movie of the same name.	First-person game mixes stealth, action, and Q's gadgets. You even get to ski. That's cool.	PC game is being delayed for the PS2 version.	**Thumbs up.** It's Bond, James Bond, and that means it has a license to be killer. With the QUAKE III engine and the coolest spy setting going, we can't wait for this one.
 **Blair Witch** (Terminal Reality, Human Head, and Ritual) *ETA: Q4 00*	Three developers create three new episodes that predate the surprisingly successful indie film.	The NOCTURNE engine is very cinematic and should provide the right atmosphere.	The NOCTURNE engine is designed for looks, not gameplay.	**Thumbs down.** In 2000, three *Blair Witch* games entered the retail shelves and were never seen again. Weird camera angles work for spooky films, but not for spooky games.

And From Games to Movies...

Give Hollywood credit. Several years ago, they tried to muscle into the game business and failed because the games they made sucked. They took that in stride, came right back, and made movies based on games that also sucked.

Double Dragon
Two brothers united in a fight against evil should have united to prevent this film from being made.

Super Mario Bros.
This movie is proof that Nintendo – along with cockroaches – will survive a nuclear war. What a waste of Bob Hoskins and Dennis Hopper.

Wing Commander
Sonar in space? Freddie Prinze Jr. instead of Mark Hamill? As a film director, Chris Roberts is a great game designer.



Mortal Kombat
Just like the game, the fight scenes are great fun. The game sticks to fighting. The movie doesn't. Fatality!



Street Fighter
It's sad that this was Raul Julia's last movie. Sadder still is that for Jean-Claude Van Damme, it wasn't.

Finally, we're hoping that the upcoming *Tomb Raider* doesn't suck. Lara at last sheds her polygons. What will Angelina Jolie shed?



CGW PROFILE

American McGee

The man who put the knife in Alice's hand.



First, the name. Also, any problems when traveling?
The most difficult was in Japan, where saying, "I am American" will get you, "I know you are, but what is your name, stupid?" Eventually I became "Takashi"... much easier that way. And the Japanese realize automatically that if you're using a Japanese name, it's because your own name is something dumb.

Why Alice, and is Beatrix Potter safe from your clutches?
Alice just seemed natural. The characters, the environments, and the story are all so amazingly well-adapted to becoming a video game. Everything about a truly gothic/Victorian wonderland appealed to me. Beatrix is probably safe from my clutches... I don't think parents (or kids, for that matter) would appreciate my interpretation, but then again, who knows?

You got your first break by living in the same apartment complex as John Carmack. What if you had lived next door to Sid Meier?
Something tells me that Sid and I wouldn't have formed the same bond as John and I did. If it had happened though, I would have been just as honored to learn under Sid as I am for having the chance to learn with John. Actually, I think if I had lived next door to Sid, he would have moved to another part of town.

What's cool about Alice?
Alice the character? That's there's a lot more to her than people are expecting.

ALICE the game? That there's a lot more to it than people are expecting.

Do you think ALICE will upset fans of the book? Is this going to be a game that parents will let their kids play?
Upset? Not really. To date, we've received tons of comments via the Web site (**alice.ea.com**) and e-mail. Of those comments, I would say that maybe one percent of them have been negative. This is going to be a game that parents will need to put some thought into before letting their kids play it. It is not a children's game in any respect, and I think we've done a good job of making that clear to everyone.

What's the craziest non-gaming stunt you've ever pulled?
My friends Chris, Eiso, and our respective wives/girlfriends like to do a sort of performance art on the weekends in San Francisco. Lately, we've been wearing 80's rock-star hair and crazy outfits, then going out to dinner at the nicest restaurant we can find. We call ourselves the "Fingerling Brothers" and generally try to cause as much havoc as possible. We were mistaken for Bon Jovi once! Rock on, Bakimonos!

Has immersing yourself in the world of Lewis Carroll given you any weird dreams at night?
I think it would be more accurate to say that the world of Lewis Carroll has immersed itself into my weird dreams at night. *—Interview by Mark Asher*

Microsoft's Big Huge Deal

Brian Reynolds' new company makes deal with devil

The rich just got richer, again.

Two months after devouring Bungie, Microsoft has added yet another A-list developer to its growing gaming roster. This time it's Brian Reynolds, the creative genius who—in partnership with Sid Meier—brought us CIVILIZATION II and ALPHA CENTAURI. Reynolds split with Meier earlier this year to form his own company, Big Huge Games, and now Microsoft has announced that it will be the exclusive publisher and distributor of all Big Huge-developed games.

"This is the culmination of where we are aiming Big Huge Games," said Reynolds. "We're a group of guys with a particular dream, and a particular game that we want to create. It's going to require significant resources and time, and we need a publisher that believes in us. In Microsoft we found a game group that's not just about marketing and distribution—it's gamers who understand games and will offer significant contributions to all parts of the development process."



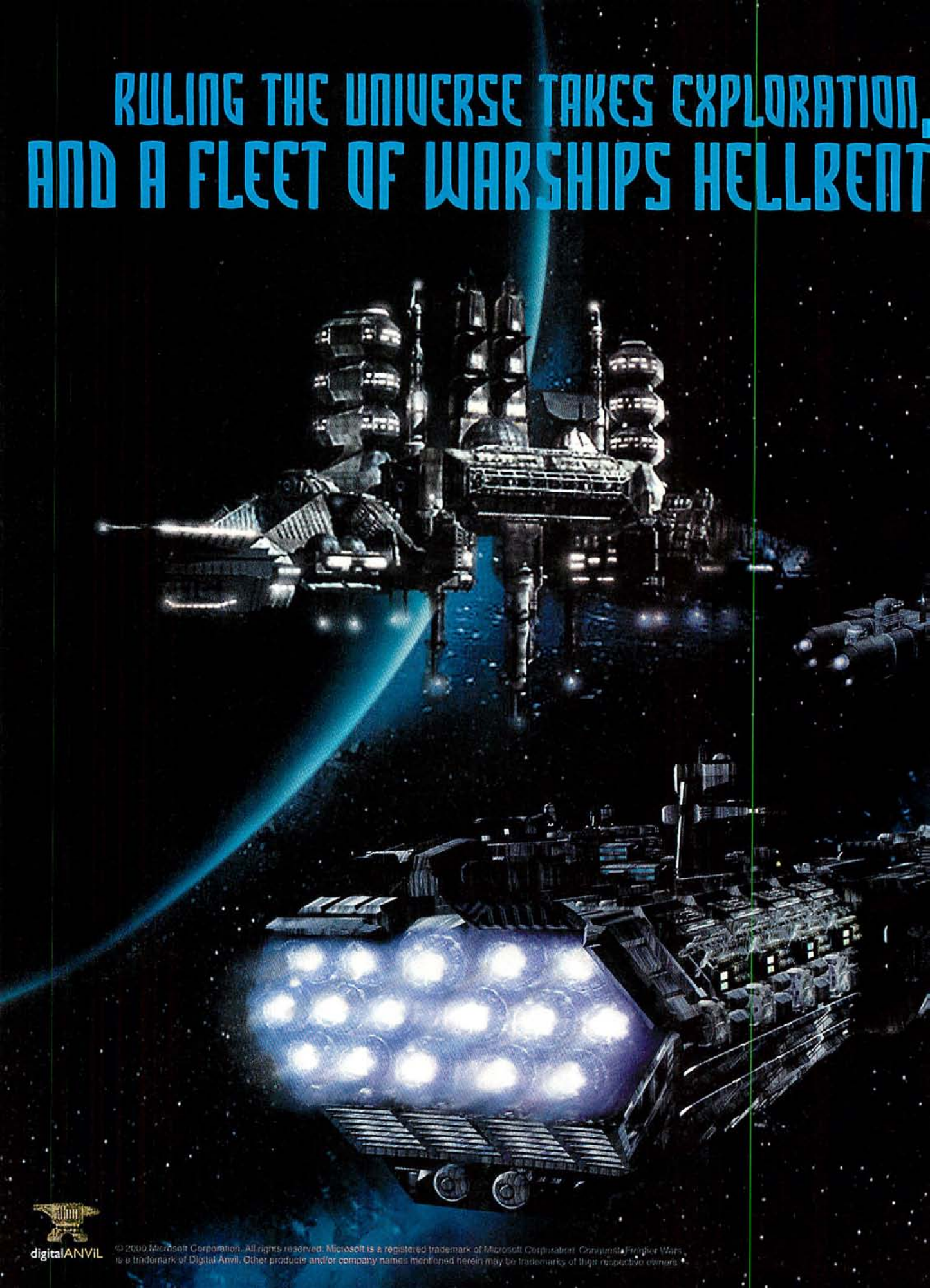
Brian Reynolds

The deal specifically includes PC games. Ed Fries, vice president of games publishing at Microsoft, says, "This is a concrete example that PC games are going strong, and that we're committed to them. The 'PC is dead' talk comes around every time a new set of consoles come out, but it's never true. The PC is a great platform, and it will always have the best performance and the best graphics."

Big Huge hasn't disclosed any details yet about its games. As for Microsoft, we asked Fries who might be next, and jokingly suggested id Software.

"If I could work with John Carmack," said Fries, "I'd love to do that." *—Jeff Green*

RULING THE UNIVERSE TAKES EXPLORATION, AND A FLEET OF WARSHIPS HELLBENT



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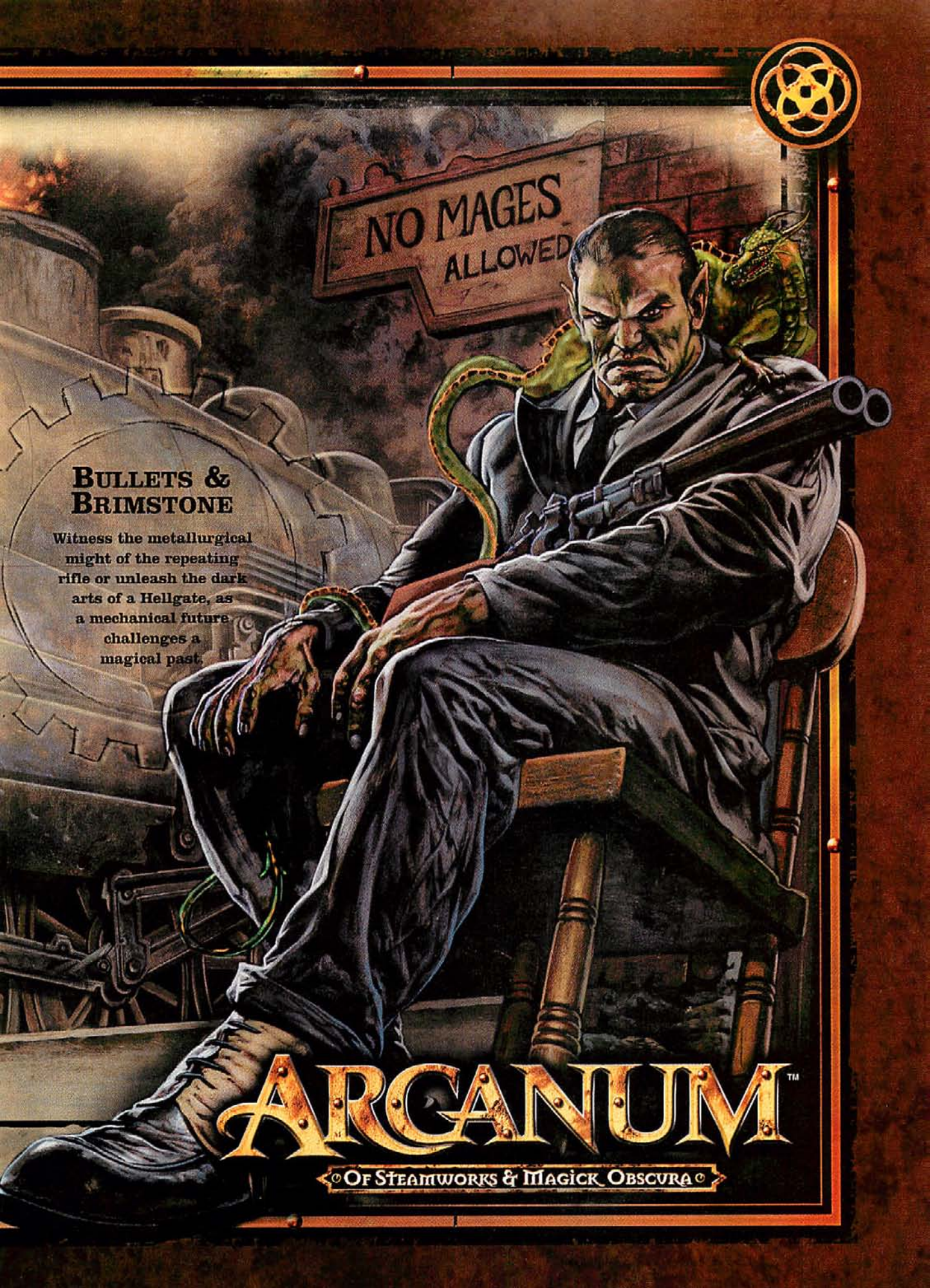
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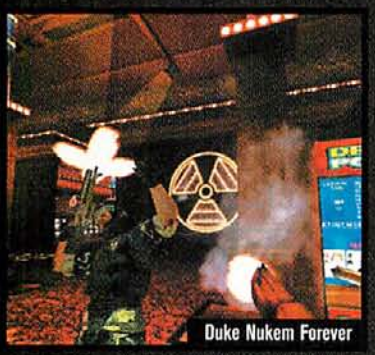
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pipeline

We know that game developers tend to use dartboards when determining release dates, so we broke out with even bigger dartboards for the Pipeline. Sometimes, we'll nail the release down to the month; other times we'll give the developers some breathing room by using a general season. Also, we'll highlight some of the more notable releases and pass some preliminary judgement on them before the real reviews are written. Lastly, if you're a publisher, make sure you tell us where your darts have been hitting so that we're not completely blind, okay? Send notices to: cgwpipeline@ziffdavis.com

ARCANUM: Most of the content is done, but the development team decided to push this title all the way to February, in order to properly beta-test the game. There should be an open-beta test by the time you're reading this.


Duke Nukem Forever

■■■ **DUKE NUKEM FOREVER:** 3DRealms recently announced that they're looking for a programmer to code the multiplayer game. The single-player game may be nearly complete, if they're starting to get serious about multiplayer.

ONI: Bungie says they're at the "Ultra-Near-Done-Alpha" stage.

RETURN TO WOLF: Gray Matter reports that they're about "60 percent" done with the game. Translated: Give it another 10-12 months.

SUMMONER: Like a few other titles, the PC game was pushed to next year to accommodate the release of the PS2 version this fall.

SIMMARS: As reported in Inside Strategy, SIMMARS was placed "on hold" in the wake of THE SIMS. In other news, there have also been comments about working on a multiplayer-version of THE SIMS, but no official word on that so far.

STARS: SUPERNOVA GENESIS: Good news – they're in the home stretch, beta-testing-wise (going through second beta), and should be on track for the shelves soon.

■■■ **HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM:** It looks to be just like BROOD WAR – an example of what expansion packs should be. Interface improvements, graphical tweaks, new technologies, and a slicker-sounding story...could it go wrong?


Homeworld: Cataclysm

■■■ **STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE:**

Raise the shields, put the Federation on hold – this looks like an honest-to-God good *Star Trek* action game. We got a playable build two weeks ago, and since then, four editors have been eating it up. It boasts beautiful graphics and mostly solid AI, but appears to be a bit short. This is preliminary, though – watch for our full review next month.


Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

4 x 4 Evolution G.O.D.	Winter 2000	
American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000	
Anachronox Eidos	Winter 2000	
Anne McCaffrey's Freedom: First Resistance Red Storm Entertainment	Dec. 2000	
Arcanum Sierra	February 2001	
B-17 Flying Fortress Hasbro	Winter 2000	
Battlecruiser Millennium 3000AD Inc.	Dec. 2000	
Battle Isle: The Andosia War Blue Byte	October 2000	
Battle Isle: Darkspace Blue Byte	Spring 2001	
Battle Of Britain Rowan Software	Winter 2000	
Battle Realms Crave Entertainment	Summer 2001	
UPDATE Black & White EA	Nov. 2000	
Blair Witch Project(s) G.O.D.	Winter 2000	
Civilization: Call To Power 2 Activision	October 2000	
Clive Barker's Undying EA	Nov. 2000	
Close Combat: Utah Beach Mattel	Winter 2000	
Combat Flight Simulator 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 Westwood	Nov. 2000	
Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood	Winter 2000	
Commandos 2 Eidos	Nov. 2000	
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Fall 2000	
Destroyer Command Mattel	Winter 2000	
NEW Deus Ex 2 Eidos	Winter 2001	
Dragon's Lair 3D Blue Byte	April 2001	
Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge Bethesda	February 2001	
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	April 2001	
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	August 2001	
Echelon Bethesda	Winter 2000	
Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda	Winter 2001	
Empire Earth Sierra	Spring 2001	
Escape From Monkey Island LucasArts	Fall 2000	
Evil Dead: Hail To The King THQ	Fall 2000	
Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood Of Steel Interplay	Spring 2001	
Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000	
NEW Freedom Force Crave	Summer 2001	
Freelancer Microsoft	Spring 2001	
Galactic Commander Online 3000AD Inc.	Summer 2001	
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000	
Halo Bungie	January 2001	
UPDATE Harpoon 4 Hasbro	Spring 2001	
Hitman: Code 47 Eidos	Sept. 2000	
IHRA Drag Racing Bethesda	Fall 2000	
IL-2 Sturmovik Blue Byte	Spring 2001	
I'm Going In Eidos	October 2000	
Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Fall 2000	
Legends Of Might & Magic 300	Winter 2000	
Loose Cannon Microsoft	Winter 2000	
Magic & Mayhem 2: The Art Of Magic Bethesda	Spring 2001	
Max Payne G.O.D.	February 2001	
MechCommander 2 Microsoft	Summer 2001	
MechWarrior 4 Microsoft	Winter 2000	
Metal Gear Solid PC Microsoft	Fall 2000	
Midtown Madness 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	
Motor City Online Electronic Arts	Spring 2001	
NASCAR Racing 4 Sierra	Spring 2001	
Neverwinter Nights Interplay	Summer 2001	
No One Lives Forever Fox Interactive	December 2000	
Oni Bungie	Fall 2000	
Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Winter 2000	
Praetorians Eidos	March 2001	
Republic: The Revolution Eidos	Winter 2001	
Red Faction THQ	Spring 2001	
Return To Wolfenstein Activision	Nov. 2000	
Rune G.O.D.	Nov. 2000	
NEW Sacrifice Interplay	Fall 2000	
Sea Dogs Bethesda	Winter 2000	
Settlers IV Blue Byte	Nov. 2000	
Sid Meier's Civilization III Hasbro	Fall 2001	
Sid Meier's Dinosaur! Firaxis	Winter 2001	
Sigma Microsoft	Fall 2001	
Silent Hunter II SSI	Summer 2001	
Simsville EA	Spring 2001	
Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Winter 2000	
Squad Leader Hasbro	Winter 2000	
UPDATE Startopia Eidos	Dec. 2000	
Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan LucasArts	Winter 2000	
UPDATE Summoner THQ	Spring 2001	
UPDATE Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Fall 2001	
UPDATE The World Is Not Enough EA	Winter 2000	
NEW Thief III Eidos	Winter 2001	
Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Winter 2000	
Tribes 2 Sierra	Fall 2000	
Tropico G.O.D.	March 2001	
WarCraft III Blizzard	Summer 2001	
Warlords IV Mattel Interactive	Spring 2001	
Waterloo Breakaway Games	Winter 2000	
Wizards & Warriors Activision	Winter 2000	

The Latest Heaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

STEALTHMODE

By Former Defense Secretary Dick Sneaky

■■■ The orcs have come home to roost at Sierra. As faithful readers may recall, Mr. Sneaky previously mentioned that Sierra was about to lose the *Middle Earth* license after they fired the MIDDLE EARTH ONLINE team and shut down production. I hinted at developments more dire, and it's happened: **Sierra has sued the Tolkien estate** to establish their right to make a *Middle Earth* game, and the Tolkien estate has countered with their own lawsuit, asking that the rights to make *Middle Earth* games be returned to them.

As part of the contract with the Tolkien estate, Sierra was supposed to deliver a *Middle Earth* game or they would be in breach of contract. So they did, or so they say. Earlier this year, Sierra supposedly finished a game set in Tolkien's *Middle Earth* mythos. Why wasn't it released? Apparently, Sierra wasn't allowed to publicize it or sell it without prior approval, and the Tolkien estate said no. It's likely that the Tolkien people thought the game stunk, and that Sierra threw something together to satisfy the contract and to hold on to the rights. Sierra says they would love to talk about the game, but they can't. Hmmm.



Preview the upcoming Lord of the Rings movie at www.lordoftherings.net.

Elsewhere in gamedom, **an Infogrames exec recently had quite a brainstorm.** Believing that most gamers never finish a game anyway, he proposed turning 60-hour games into 40-hour games. He had an actual formula that converts hours of gameplay into development weeks, so he thinks Infogrames can cut development time by a third. He probably also thinks that Jerry Lewis is a comic genius.

Steve Petersen, the guy who started the CHAMPIONS RPG game (and who worked on the PC version that was never finished) says he's been approached by companies who are interested in doing a PC version of CHAMPIONS. **There's even talk of doing a massively-multiplayer superhero game.**

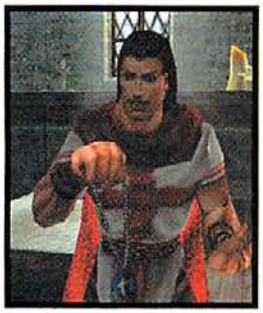
White Wolf has been talking to Activision about taking VAMPIRE forward, with discussions ranging from a full-blown PC sequel down to new multiplayer missions.


Mysteries explained: how the French formulate new theories.

Why haven't you seen the JAGGED ALLIANCE expansion? It's been done for months. Sirtech is reportedly unhappy with the publishing deals they've been offered. They want more money, in other words. Expect one side to buckle so they can get a gold version out for the holidays.

My guess is that Interplay and Shiny have the rights to make a *Matrix* game. Most likely a PS2 title.

Nintendo of Seattle's engineers have an interesting assessment of the competition. They praise the Dreamcast (safe, since it's likely to be a marginalized competitor). They think the PS2 is too hard to program and don't think the current games make the system worth buying. Finally, they hate the Xbox's unified memory architecture and think it will be a continuing problem.



Vampire: the Patch

1.1 patch for Nihilistic's RPG makes it more palatable

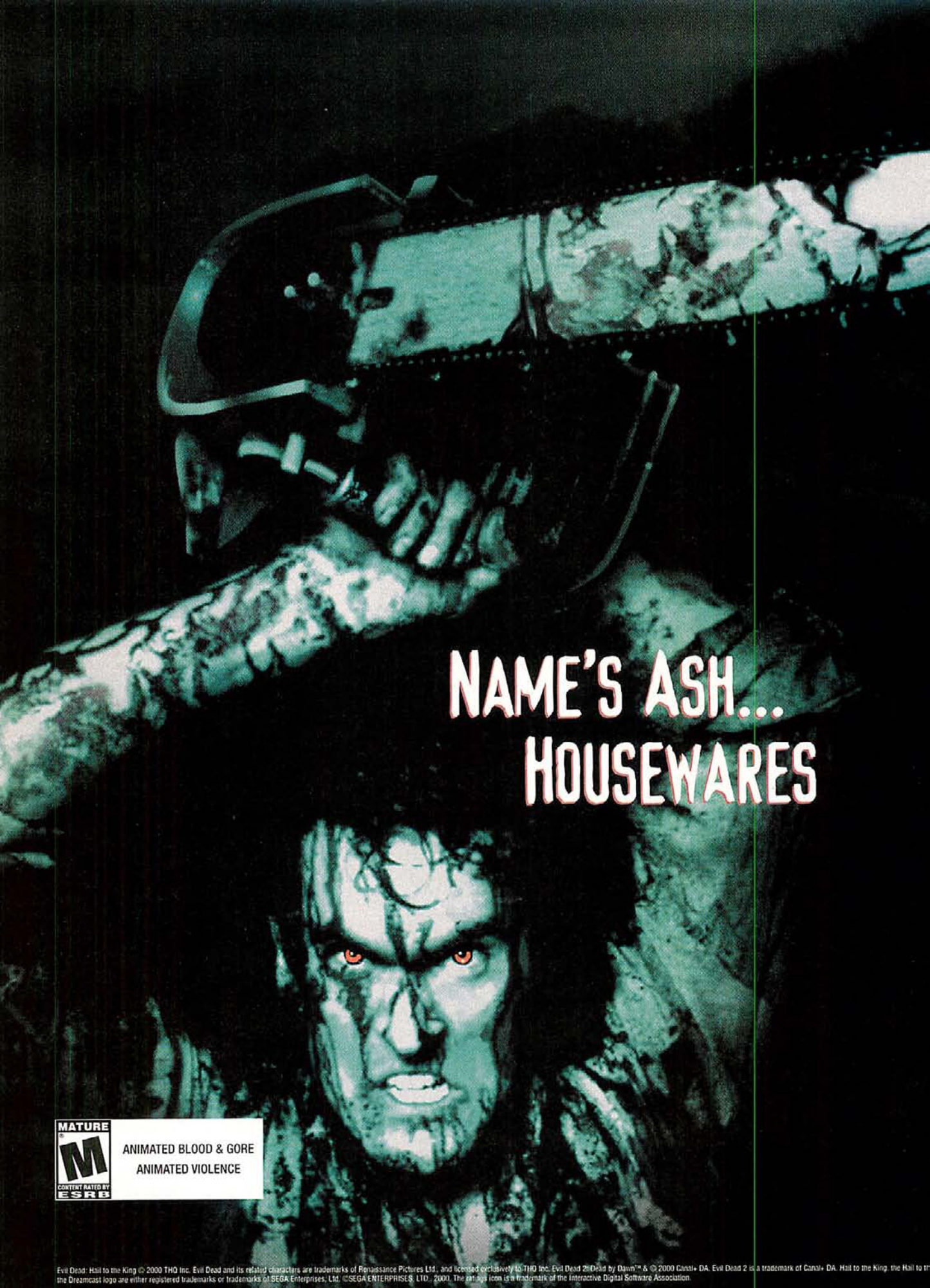
■■■ In response to fan complaints/comments/requests, Nihilistic and Activision have delivered a patch to VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE that has definitely improved the game. Although the patch contains numerous bug-fixes and tweaks, the most important changes are two gameplay additions: the ability to save anywhere, and to pause combat. VAMPIRE's save-game system still isn't as good as that of DIABLO II, where town portals and waypoints made it easier to pick up where you left off, especially early on.

But the new patch makes the single-player game much less frustrating. The game is so story-driven that the ability to save anywhere means you can now experience that story in a more fulfilling way. Being able to pause combat also makes a big difference, making things less chaotic. Combat is still real-time, but now, at least you can pause to get potions or weapons ready as necessary.

We don't rate games based on patches, but we wanted you to know that it has been improved. You'll find the patch at **www.activision.com**. *–Jeff Green*


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HAIL TO THE KING

CHAINSAWS, BOOMSTICKS,
AND DEADITES, OH MY!

SLICE AND DICE THE UNDEAD
WITH A WEAPON IN EACH HAND.

FIGHT EVIL ACROSS THE SPANS OF TIME: FROM THE
INFAMOUS CABIN TO ANCIENT DAMASCUS.

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BRUCE CAMPBELL AS ASH!



Screenshots from Sega Dreamcast

PlayStation

Dreamcast™

WINDOWS 95/98

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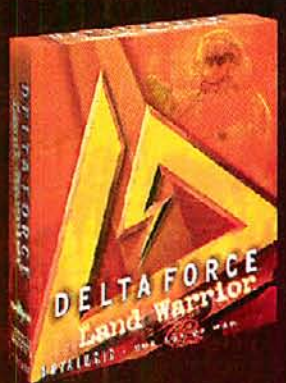


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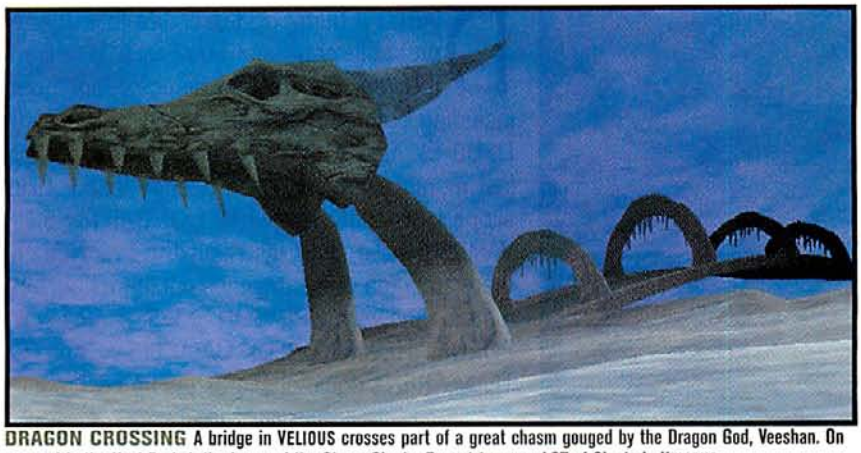
NovaWorld™

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

NOVALOGIC - THE ART OF WAR™

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DRAGON CROSSING A bridge in VELIOUS crosses part of a great chasm gouged by the Dragon God, Veeshan. On one end is the Kael Drakel, the home of the Storm Giants. Expect to see a LOT of Giants in VELIOUS.

Quest Enhancement

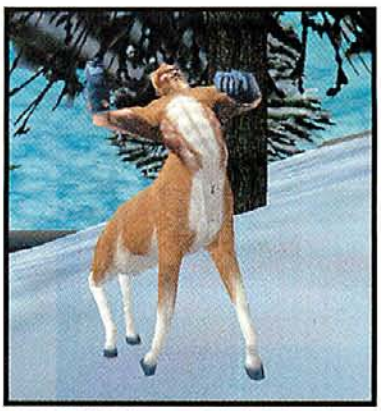
EVERQUEST expands to an unchartered ice continent that's cooler than cool

WANTED: EVERQUEST junkies to jump all over Verant Interactive's upcoming expansion, which adds 16 new adventure zones to the already expansive EQ world. The Scars of Velious is a massive glacial land where the great dragons have existed for eons in icy solitude. The new realm is a place of ice caves, crystal caverns, dwarven fortresses, storm giant steads, and the mysterious Plane of Mischief—where heroes are said to be as powerful as gods.

The mix of unfamiliar creatures you'll encounter in VELIOUS include: storm and frost giants, ice and undead dragons, sirens, ottermen, cave bears, snow orcs, and walrusmen. Travelers will also be introduced to a myriad of new races, NPCs, weapons, spells, quests, and different forms of travel—including cantankerous sea gnomes who will ferry characters from zone to zone.

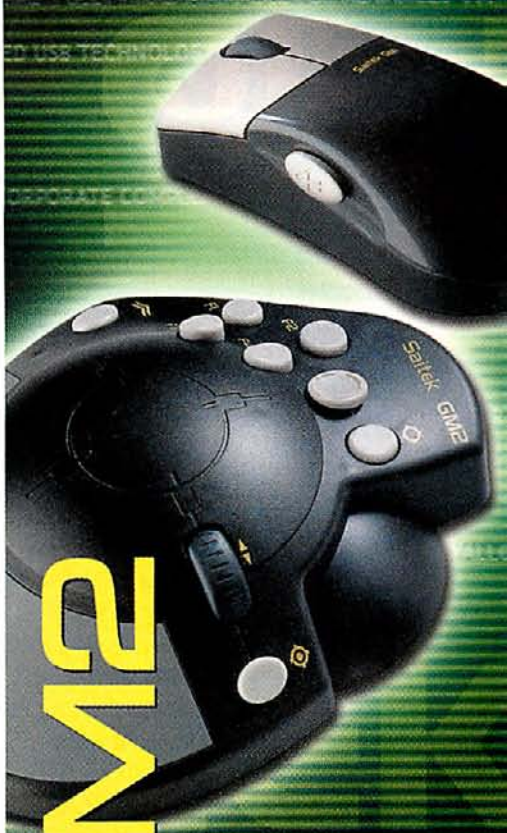
A word to the wary: The new add-on is not for the faint of heart. Only experienced characters of at least 30th-level and above need apply. THE SCARS OF VELIOUS—a welcome addition to the immersive world of Norrath—is scheduled for release in December 2000. *—Raphael Liberatore*





HOOFING IT Players can take their characters up to the 60th level in the new expansion, and interact with new races like the Dwarves of Coldain, the Snowfang Gnolls, or this wandering centaur.

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Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

This Month	Last Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas	5
2	11	**Diablo II** Havas	5
3	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
4	3	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
5	4	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
6	6	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas	5
7	5	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
8	7	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
9	8	**The Sims** Electronic Arts	5
NEW	10	–	**Motocross Madness 2** Microsoft	4.5
11	9	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5
12	10	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
NEW	13	–	**Deus Ex** Eidos	3.5
14	19	**Soldier of Fortune** Activision	2.5
15	21	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
16	15	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
17	13	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
18	12	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
19	14	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
NEW	20	–	**Icewind Dale** Interplay	4.5
21	16	**Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
22	17	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
23	18	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
24	20	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
25	23	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** Hasbro	4
26	24	**Thief 2** Eidos	4.5
27	22	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
28	25	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
NEW	29	–	**Motocross Madness** Microsoft	4.5
30	26	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
31	27	**Final Fantasy VIII** Eidos	2
32	29	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
33	28	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
34	33	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
35	31	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
36	30	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
37	35	**Shogun: Total War** Electronic Arts	4.5
NEW	38	–	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear Urban Ops** Red Storm	4.5
39	36	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
40	37	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at *www.computergaming.com.* The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

DIABLO II burns up the charts to #2, where it'll probably stay until HALF-LIFE is retired later this year. Several new games debut this month, including both MOTOCROSS MADNESS titles (huh?), DEUS EX, and ICEWIND DALE. Meanwhile, some of last month's newbies have already faded: SHOGUN slipped two notches, while COMBAT MISSION and VAMPIRE have both fallen off the list. Nonetheless, there are a ton of great games out there right now, and more on the way: CRIMSON SKIES, STAR TREK ELITE FORCE, HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM, and QUAKE TEAM ARENA could shake things up next month.

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Deus Ex

At one point, half the office could be found plugging its ears and humming so as not to hear the plot being divulged across the room. Ah sweet, sweet FPS addiction...where hast thou been?



Icewind Dale

ICEWIND DALE is the RPG of the moment, satisfying our post-DIABLO 2 jones for hardcore tactical gameplay. Black Isle's winning streak continues.



Unreal Tournament: Tactical Ops

As if we needed another reason to play UT. The new add-on is the most addictive anti-terrorist mod since HALF LIFE: COUNTERSTRIKE. Get it at **www.planetunreal.com/tacticalops/.**



Crimson Skies beta

Somebody call Mama – we just wore out the seats of our pants, thanks to the wild air combat of CRIMSON SKIES, Microsoft's latest genre-buster.

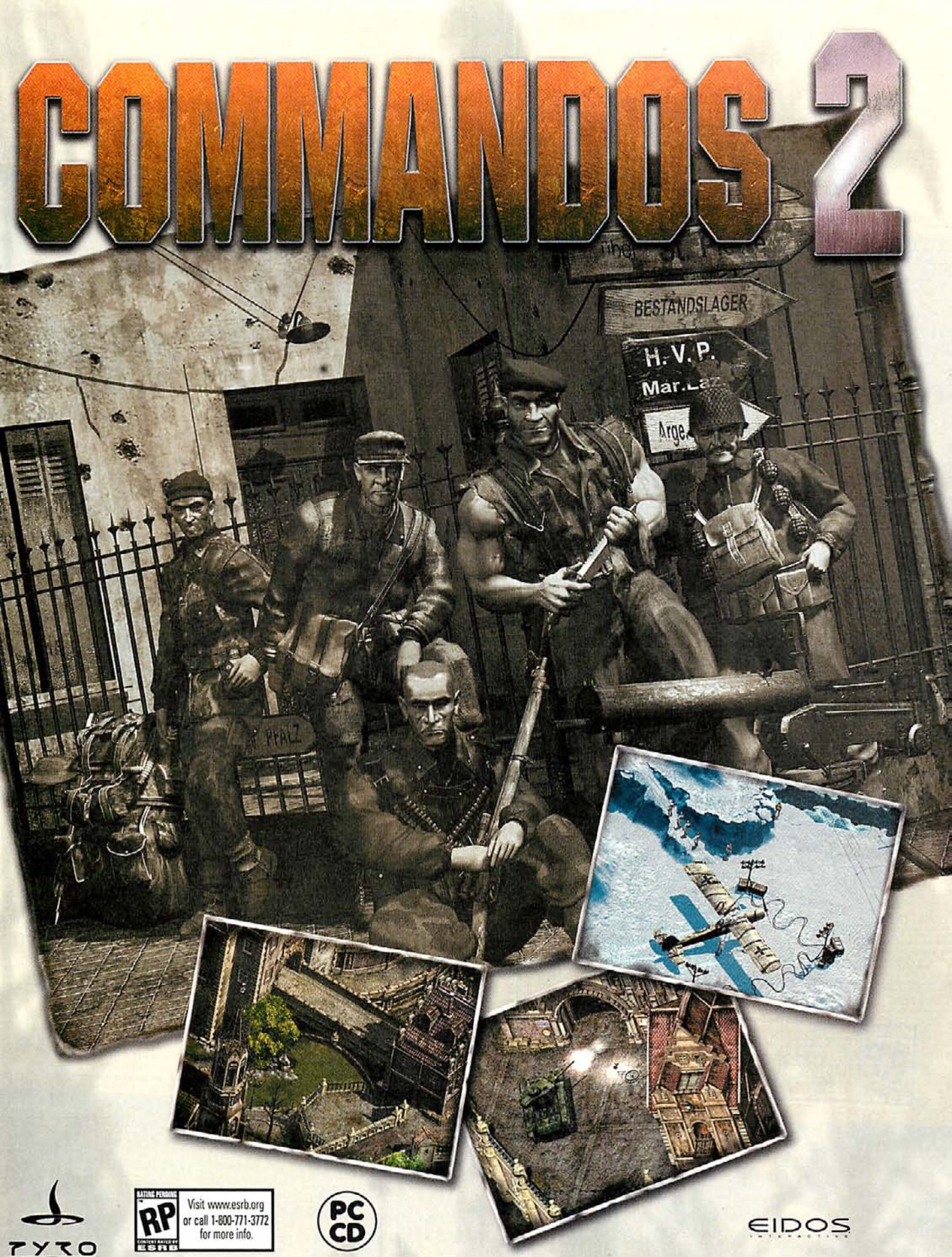


Madden 2001

Thankfully, the only new PC football game this year is the greatest ever.



COMMANDOS 2



PYRO STUDIOS

RP RATING PENDING — Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info. — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD

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Death can strike anyone.

For the right price.

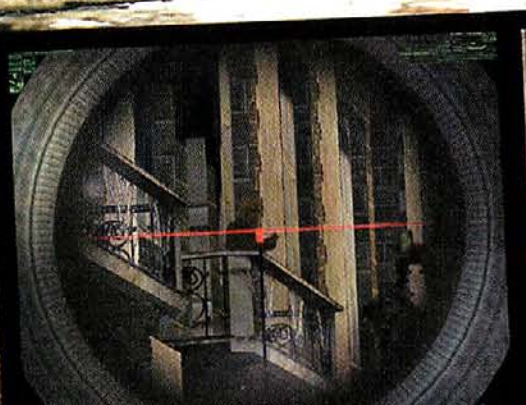
You never know when death will come—unless you make a few special arrangements. Because once the Hitman takes your assignment, someone takes a bullet. It's not a righteous way of life, but we all have to make a living. Even if it means making a killing.

- Plan your assignment to account for multiple completion paths to each mission.
- Access black market weapons, decoys, traps, and personnel from an innovative currency reward system.
- Artificial intelligence that redefines the genre of the "Thinking Shooter".
- Learn how to become a more proficient hitman through a comprehensive weapons and agility training session.
- Gripping and mature plot driven by stunning cinematic visuals.

HITMAN™

CODENAME 47









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Find Yourself. Somewhere Else.

you had the strength to crush steel and bone?
you could bend reality to your will?
your thoughts became deeds of valor?

Ever Wonder?



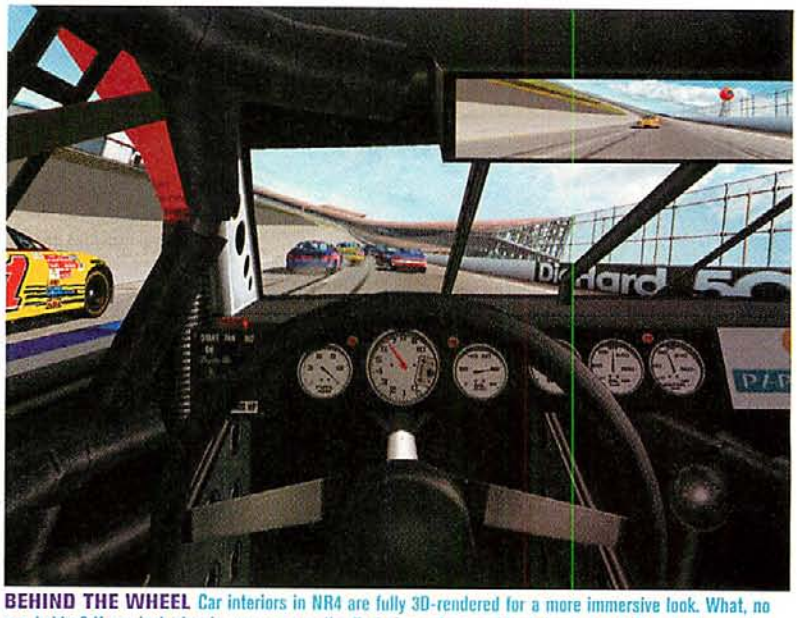
NASCAR Racing 4

It'll be out this February, February, February

by Tom Price

NASCAR is one of the fastest-growing spectator sports in America, with something along the lines of 250 million people attending or tuning in to NASCAR events last year alone. But it's not so much the middle-American fan-base that has made NASCAR such a hot license for the video and computer game market; it's the hardcore racing simulation enthusiasts. Ask any one of those grognards what the top NASCAR computer game is, and few will disagree that Sierra's NASCAR RACING series from the award-winning Papyrus Studios rules the roost. The latest installment, NASCAR RACING 4, is slated for release in February, coinciding with the Daytona 500. As you can see from these exclusive new screens, NASCAR RACING 4's new game engine is one of the most amazing we've ever encountered.

NASCAR RACING 4
- GENRE: Racing
- RELEASE DATE: Q1 01
- PUBLISHER: Sierra Studios
- DEVELOPER: Papyrus
- CONTACT: www.papy.com



BEHIND THE WHEEL Car interiors in NR4 are fully 3D-rendered for a more immersive look. What, no cup holder? If you look closely, you can see the first signs of an accident dead-ahead. The physics engine has been modified to allow cars to get completely inverted.



RUSTY IN FRONT It's not just the cars that are highly detailed. Check out those track textures. We've never seen such nice cracks (and we're not talking about those fans bending over to get another Pabst out of the cooler).





CORKSCREW FOLLIES Sears Point raceway is one of the more unique tracks on the NASCAR Winston Cup schedule – due, in part, to being one of the few non-ovals, but also due to the fact that it's set in the middle of California's wine country. Unfortunately, the age-old question 'what goes best with pork rinds, white or red?' remains unanswered.



WHAT'S ON DRAFT? As any racing fan will tell you, drafting can be the name of the game. NR4's advanced AI makes for drivers that use real-world tactics.



THE INSIDE TRACK The new graphics engine really pushes the photo-realism envelope. If I wasn't wearing pants and drinking a warm beer, I'd think I was watching this on T.V.

Sega Rally now available on PC.

You know, like the one in your office.



SEGA RALLY 2

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP™



Customize your car's setup for maximum velocity and perfect handling.



Leave the competition in the dust. Unless it's raining or snowing - then let 'em eat mud!



Tackle 21 white-knuckled courses - day or night, through all kinds of weather

EVERYONE

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Sega's hottest racing game ever is now available on PC. Get ready for that road-chewing, dirt-spitting action you've come to expect. With a fully customizable car, you might even survive to see the checkered flag. Race the computer or challenge your friends over the Internet. And remember, if too much Sega Rally gets you fired from your job...it works great on home computers too.

Feast on the souls of your enemies | by Thierry Nguyen

Sacrifice

The folks at Shiny have an obvious God complex.

Shiny's MESSIAH was just the first step; it had you at the whim of only one Divine Being. SACRIFICE throws you into an ungodly godly slugfest that might be the result if you put the Greek pantheon on the Jerry Springer Show. You play as a wily wizard out to make his own way in the name of one of these gods, through a contest of action and strategy similar to that of the BATTLEZONE games.

SACRIFICE
GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q3 00
PUBLISHER: Interplay
DEVELOPER: Shiny Entertainment
CONTACT: www.shiny.com

HOW DO YOU TAKE DOWN A GOD?



The base of any god's power is the altar. It's here where you'll be doing the sacrificing that the game name calls for. First, summon up your sacrificial lamb...



...then cast the Desecrate spell, which summons some witch-doctor-like fellas to start making pretty lights and weird noises around the enemy altar.



Once the enemy altar is taken down, you've probably finished the mission. Or at least gotten rid of a major opponent in the scenario.



HIS FORM IS OFF The interface is pretty straightforward: hold down the right-mouse button, and move it around to display the appropriate menu. If you know where a command is (say, Skirmish Formation is up and to the left), you can just fling your mouse that way to issue that command.



TOWERING INFERNAL Consider these your "harvester" units. You plant these towers on mana shrines around the landscape to "claim it," hence the shrine will add mana only to you and not to any other godly goober loitering around.

continued on page 68

SURVIVAL IS A STATE OF MIND.



Featuring the voice of Ice T



Earn 80 Talents [Psionic weapons] such as *Eye of Ra*, *Fireball* and *Mummy's Revenge* to destroy your opponent



Large-scale multiplay *Deathmatch* and *Insanity* modes



Over 20 story-driven single-player levels with surprising twists and turns

In the near future, Psionics are among us. Their evil thoughts disrupt and eventually corrupt even the strongest of minds. One man, Agent Nathaniel Cain, risks his own sanity to save ours. But, Cain is about to learn the ultimate lesson...that evil's relative.



SANITY™
AIKEN'S ARTIFACT™

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www.foxinteractive.com

FOX INTERACTIVE™ MONOLITH™ PC CD-ROM Windows® 95/98 TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB Animated Violence

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PREPARE TO SWALLOW HIS SOUL



Your units use souls as a resource. All corpses create souls; your own forces have easily-recoverable souls, while enemies create souls that need to be converted.



Cast Convert in order to call a Sac-Doctor (the same guys who perform Desecration Rituals) out to the field.

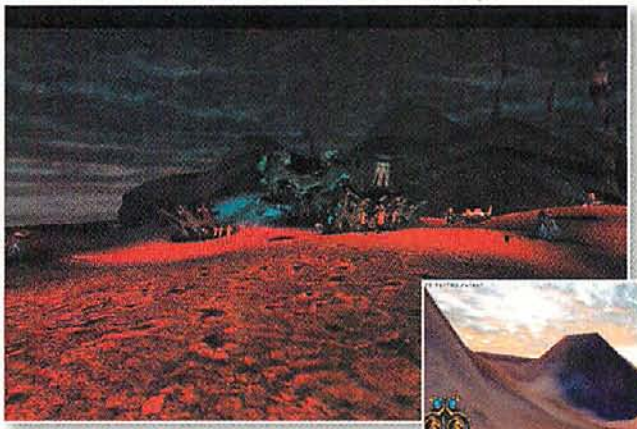


Let the Sac-Doctor get to work. Keep guard of him here, because if he gets hit even once, he'll run away like a hysterical little girl.



Once he has the soul all bundled up, you can leave him alone to return the soul to your altar. Your soul-count will show the appropriate increase once he actually gets to the altar.

WE JUST REDECORATED Ah, red everywhere, the souls of the dead strewn hither and thither. These games never have a happy beginning (at least graphically, it's a pretty beginning).





LET'S HOLD HANDS What's an RTS without the ability to have your units group up in important, tactical formations, such as this "protect me from other idiots!" formation?

Five Names You Won't Want to Take in Vain

1 Persephone: Goddess of Life. Following her gives you spells focusing on healing, defense, and other goody-two-shoes kinda things.

2 Charnel: God of Death. Pledging his cause gives you spells that deliver the hurt. Locusts, disease, things-with-razor-blades-for-heads... it's all about putting your enemy down before he even sees you.

3 Stratos: God of the Winds. If you'd rather run the heck away from enemies, or have followers who blitz around at insane speeds, worship him.

4 James: God of Earth. Tough creatures and structures, and spells that focus on being hard-to-kill make this God ideal for gamers who like defense, or want minions to just soak up damage.

5 Pyro: God of Fire. All you need to know is that your minions and spells are designed to Blow Things Up. Great for knocking down the structures that James' followers create.

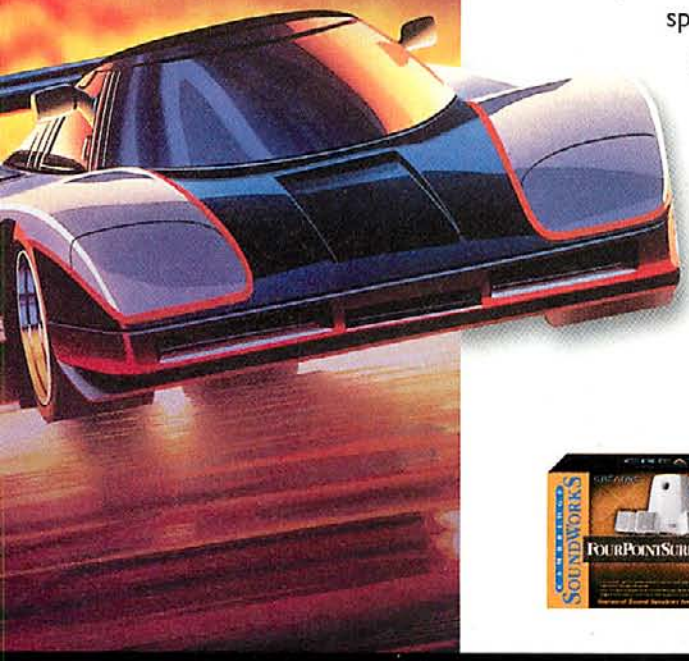


[FourPointSurround™ FPS2000 Digital]

Gaming With These Speakers Is Almost Like Cheating

With the FourPointSurround™ FPS2000 Digital speakers, winning is within your power. You will hear your enemy sneaking towards you from any direction. The FourPointSurround™ FPS2000 Digital speakers surround you with razor-sharp sound clarity, power for the most intense gaming, and bass that will kick you in the chest. If that's too much to handle, the FourPointSurround™ FPS1800 or the FourPointSurround™ FPS1500 speakers deliver true-to-life surround sound that no real gamer should be without.

You can still choose to "play by the book" - just don't come whining to us when you lose.





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FROM RICK GOODMAN

LEAD DESIGNER, AGE OF EMPIRES®

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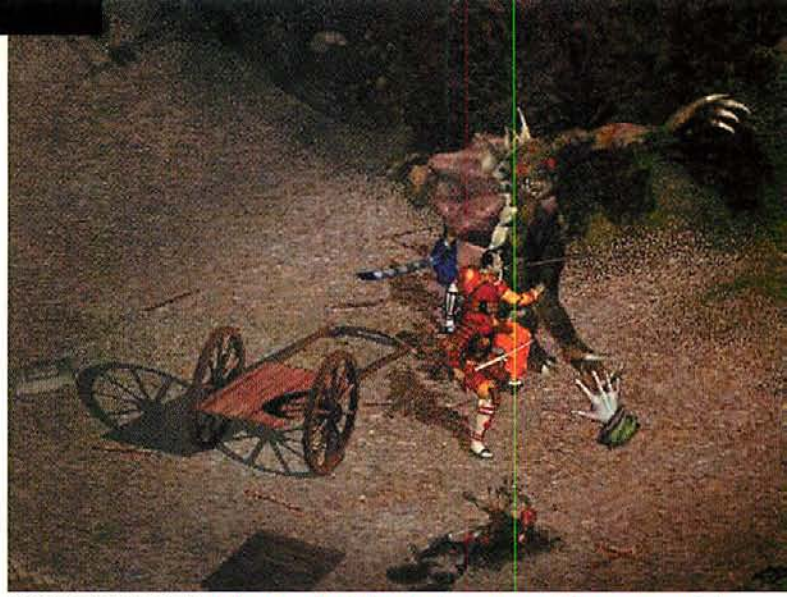
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Throne of Darkness

Daimyo meets DIABLO in this hack'n'slash role-player

by Brett Todd



UNHAPPY TOGETHER As if unruly mobs of the undead weren't enough, the seven samurai also have to contend with fearsome behemoths such as this giant turtle-like Kappa, who unfortunately doesn't spend much time under his shell.

Q: What do you get when you combine the gameplay of DIABLO with a Japanese legend, nasty undead monsters, and a gang of seven samurai straight out of an Akira Kurosawa-penned script?

A: THRONE OF DARKNESS, an upcoming action/role-playing hybrid that aims to sate those left wanting more after sending the big red guy with the horns back to hell.

Sierra is clearly hoping that lightning will strike twice—though perhaps that should be thrice, considering the multi-million-selling success of DIABLO II—when it ships the Click Entertainment-designed title in the first quarter of next year. High aspirations? Sure. But judging from the state of an eight-level beta demo I've been playing of late, they may not be far off the mark. Everything is in a very early state at the moment, but the building blocks have been put into place for this game to be a worthy successor to the Blizzard blockbuster's legacy. And here's one more hook for you: The game's designers—Doron Gartner and Ben Haas—are both Blizzard alumni, and were members of the original DIABLO design team.

THRONE OF DARKNESS
GENRE: Role-Playing/Action • RELEASE DATE: Q1 01
PUBLISHER: Sierra
DEVELOPER: Click Entertainment
CONTACT: www.throneofdarkness.com



THE SEVERED HEADS GIVE IT AWAY I'm betting that this would be the Dark Warlord.



ADVENTURES IN BLOODLETTING Your adventures in Japanese mythology involve fighting hordes of demonic creatures. Bony bowmen, sword-wielding skeletons, and devilish warriors that spout buckets of blood when they're struck down are only just some of the dark forces arrayed against your party.

The Evil Undead

THRONE OF DARKNESS is solidly rooted in medieval Japanese folklore. It begins with the fall of Kira Tsunayoshi, a corrupt Shogun who took a cursed potion to stave off a curse from the Kami—four elemental deities that reside in all things. The evil brew made Tsunayoshi's body immortal, but his soul was replaced by that of a demon named Tanshin. This new Dark Warlord then had vats of the elixir made up for his soldiers, who were turned into the undead upon drinking it. Other supernatural creatures were soon conjured up, and dark armies began to pillage the Yamato, killing everything in their path. Only one Daimyo (equivalent to a powerful feudal lord in medieval Europe) managed to survive this reign of terror. As dawn comes the day after the carnage, he begins to plot revenge with his seven remaining samurai.

Which is, of course, where you step into the fray. Players begin on the top floor of their Daimyo's fortress and must fight their way through fields, ravaged towns, caverns, shadowy forests, and other forbidding terrain to reach the final confrontation with the Dark Warlord. A number of quests will be assigned by the Daimyo throughout the solo campaign. Up to

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THAT HOODOO THAT YOU DO Each samurai is rated in five characteristics. They range from the self-explanatory Strength and Vitality to the more esoteric Ki – the magical energy behind spellcasting. Making offerings to the gods is another key component of magic in the game.



PLAYING WITH DOLLS The standard RPG "doll" interface is used to equip your characters. All the role-playing basics – armor, swords, bows, magic scrolls, and healing potions – are on hand, albeit with a distinctive Eastern flavor.

four of the seven samurai can be used in your party at any given time, with the remaining warriors going back to their shrine to be healed and rejuvenated. Expect to be swapping samurai in and out frequently as you proceed through the game, as each character has different skills required to advance in specific areas. The charismatic Leader, for example, is a master of tactics and is helpful during complex battles, while the Berserker maximizes damage by wielding a sword in each hand; and the sumo-like Brick can hammer down even the largest monsters with his iron kanabo (cudgel). Specialties of the other four samurai—the Archer, Ninja, Swordsman, and Mage/Wizard—are self-explanatory.

Combat is pretty much a constant during the game. Skeletal archers, black-skinned demons, gigantic Oni and Kappa, and much more serve as the Dark Warlord's minions. Combat never gets out-of-hand, however, thanks to the ability to call "plays" during scraps. Clicking on an icon in the left corner of the interface brings up a menu listing commands that order all the warriors to attack one foe, to split off and fight one-on-one, and so on. The playlist varies depending on which character you have in your party, with the Leader naturally having access to the greatest number of commands. This option comes in very handy during a full-scale battle with numerous adversaries, and allows the designers to make the real-time action more palatable to turn-based RPG fans. Adding this sort of control to the proceedings without slowing the game down is an admirable accomplishment.





HOW DO YOU SAY HOCUS POCUS IN JAPANESE? Spells are a big part of THRONE OF DARKNESS. While some of the samurai are more gifted at magic than others – and each have access to slightly different spells – all can conjure up useful offensive strikes like the Fire Bolt shown on the left, and good defensive measures such as the Ice Wall on the right.

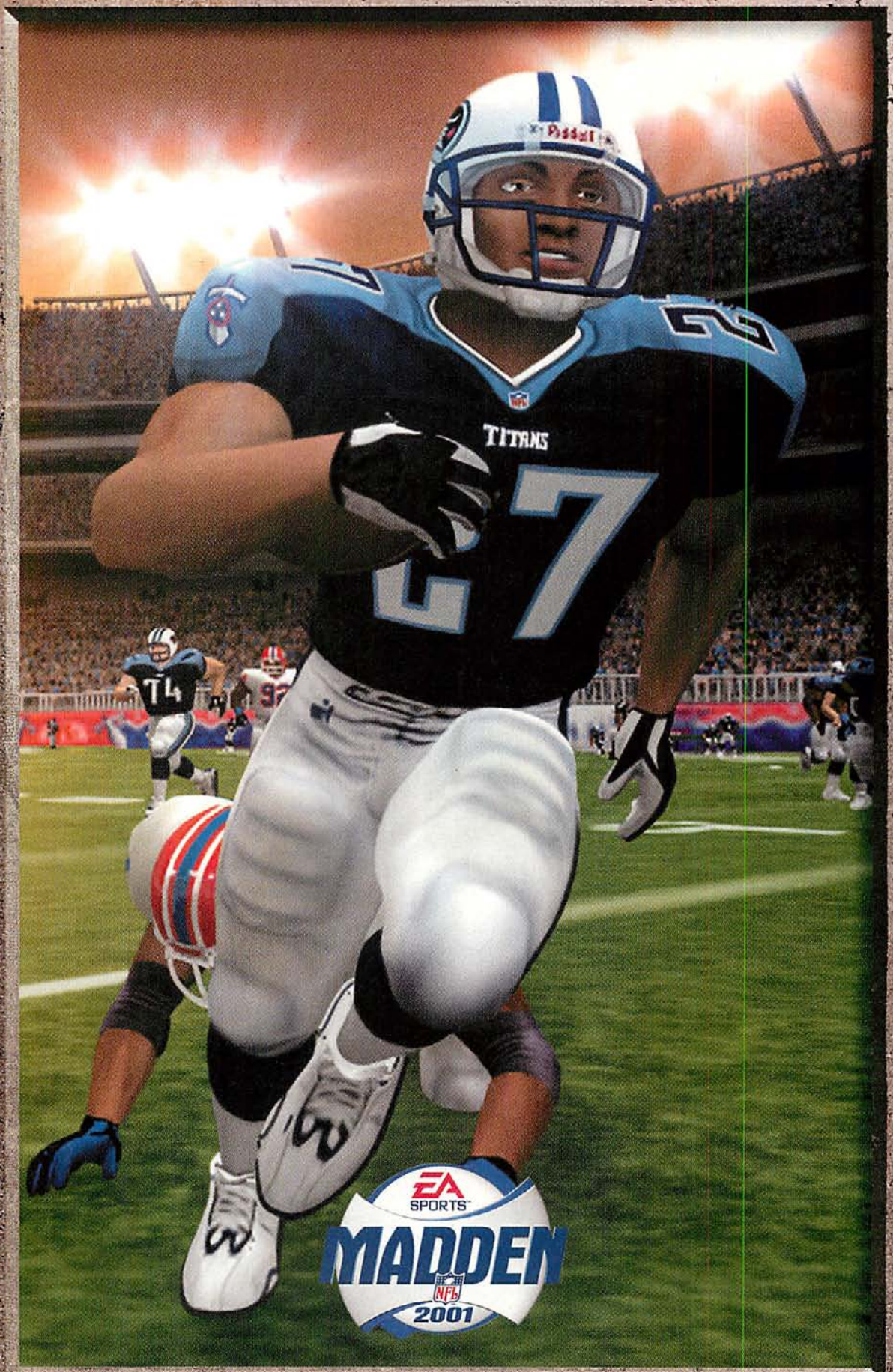
'Cause It's Witchcraft

Magic is another important part of THRONE OF DARKNESS. Along with typical attributes like Strength and Dexterity, each samurai is rated in Ki, the magical energy that powers spellcasting. While all samurai can cast spells, each has access to different ones, with the exception of a few common incantations. Some are better at magic than others, with the Mage predictably topping the list. Spells are divided into four categories based on the elements of Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. So you'll find the likes of Ice Wall, Chain Lightning, Earth Spear, and Water Kanji among the available conjurations. Some general spells—such as the Mage's Healing and Cure Poison—are available outside the elements. Further spells are obtained by making offerings to the elemental gods throughout the game. Those equally faithful to two different gods will be rewarded with special "combo spells" that take advantage of both elements. So you might be able to cast a fire-water hybrid later in the game, if you say your prayers.

Multiplayer modes function in exactly the same way as the single-player game, with the lone exception of clans. Each clan features from one to seven players who each control single samurai during the adventure. A total of 35 people can take part at one time. Up to 28 join the four different Daimyo teams aiming to topple the Dark Warlord, while the remaining seven serve as the evil one's lieutenants. This should lead to some interesting games where alliances are formed and dissolved amongst the Daimyos' men. Only one clan can emerge victorious, so even the closest of allies will eventually need to turn against one another.

Add to all this a graphical design evocative of the Far East and a dramatic musical score that brings James Clavell's *Shogun* (the novel, not the mini-series) to mind, and you've got a game that should warrant a look-see early next year. Until then, check out the official Web site at **www.throneofdarkness.com** for updates. CGW


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Startopia

Homesteading on the final frontier

by Robert Coffey



ROOM WITH A VIEW If you want to keep the wealthy Gem Slugs, you'll have to build some pretty posh apartments.

From big fiery plummeting chunks of Skylab squashing dingoes in the outback, to the overbudget and underbuilt International Space Station, the live/work space facility concept has had its share of problems.

To really enjoy the daunting challenges of interstellar construction boondoggles you needed a clip-on tie, a $500 protractor, and a cushy NASA position; that is, until late this year when STARTOPIA hits store shelves. A space station simulation in the loosest sense of the term, Mucky Foot's latest project lets you fill an orbiting ring-shaped space station with amusement parks, hotels, bars, and a wide assortment of whimsical aliens.

Runaway Development With a Purpose

As opposed to the "software sandbox" approach of other sims like SIMTHEME PARK or SIMCITY, STARTOPIA is shooting to set itself apart by offering a more focused, mission-based style of play. Space city managers will start off building very rudimentary structures (energy collectors, housing, etc.) in order to progress in the game, working their way up to missions in which they'll compete with up to three computer players for the aggressive acquisition of the 16 sections of the space station. Success can come through a number of means: political, financial, or military. The only constant in this dynamic game is the need to keep your growing alien population happy.

And that alien population is a huge part of the game. The structures you build will both attract and pacify specific aliens: If you want an army, build combat arenas to draw the warlike Kasvagorian, and "exotic bars" (wink, wink, nudge, nudge) to keep them onboard. Need to build a weapon of mass destruction? You'll probably have to corrupt your more intelligent lifeforms by denying them the more refined amenities they desire, and instead exposing them to those same arenas and exotic bars. With every creature and race having stats for their mind, body, and even their soul, you'll have to juggle everything wisely to attract and keep the population you want.



WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND? Pop-up info displays for every alien onboard will help you design the bestest, happiest space station ever.

Getting to Know You

Managing the frequently conflicting races will be an integral part of your overall strategy. Each race has a very strong personality which can influence the other races with which it interacts. The Zedem Monks, for example, will bring a sense of spirituality to your station; but if their spiritual fervor goes unchecked, they'll go Moonie on you, converting your most vital aliens into cult members, potentially leading to a disastrous wave of religious fanaticism. The same double-edged personality quirks are present in every race, like the Tribble-ish Memaus whose cute cuddliness cheers your population right up until they mature—into hideous, murderous, hard-to-kill monsters.

With all the races and structures now in place, Mucky Foot figures they're about 90% done, with just the balancing and mission structure to go. Any strategy game with balancing left to do is at best 75% done. Let's hope they don't push too hard for that Christmas release and launch STARTOPIA before she's ready for orbit. CGW



THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES This cute lil' memau will make your population happy...until it grows up and starts killing every damn thing in sight.

STARTOPIA
GENRE: Strategy • RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive
DEVELOPER: Mucky Foot
CONTACT: www.eidos.com

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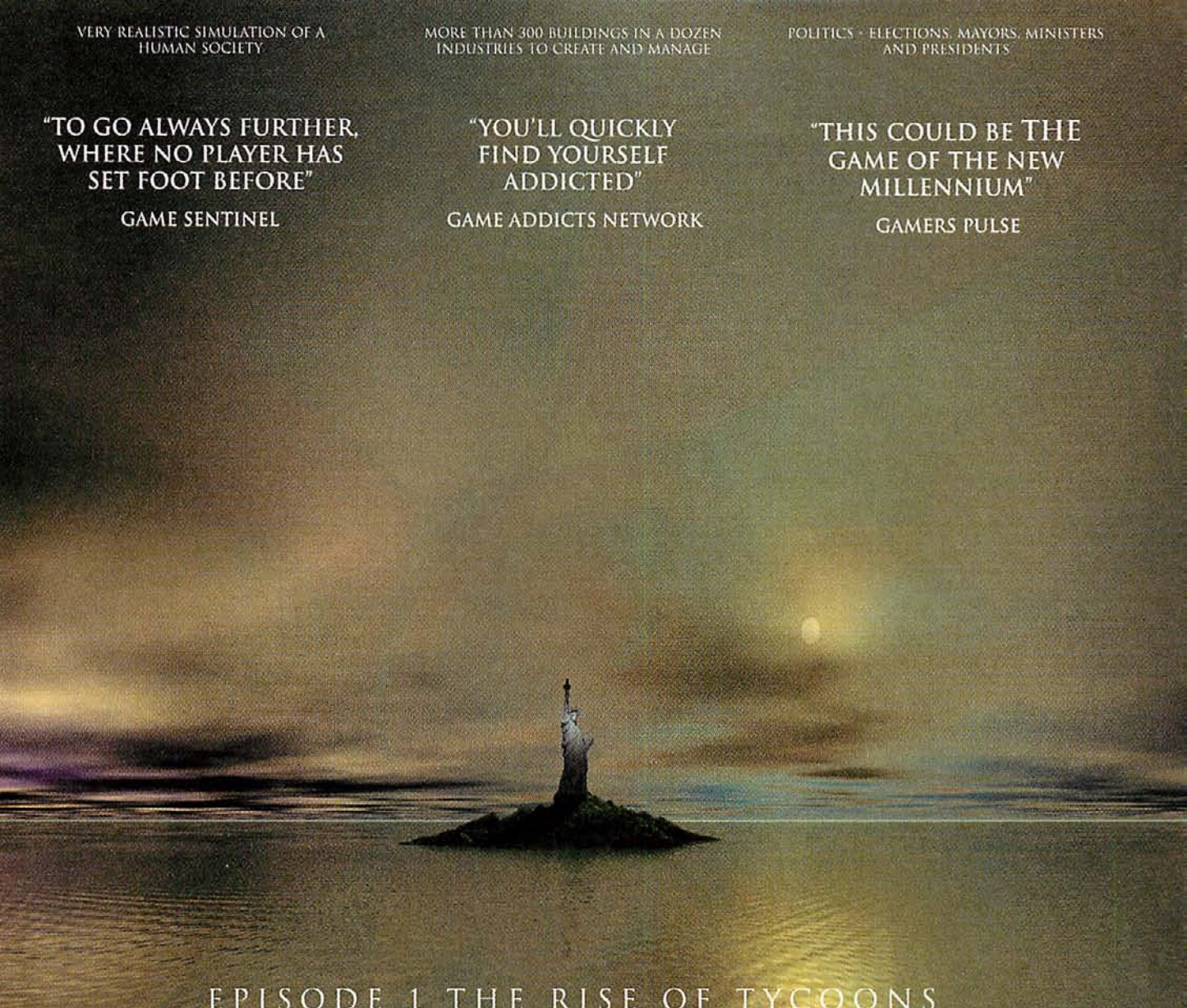
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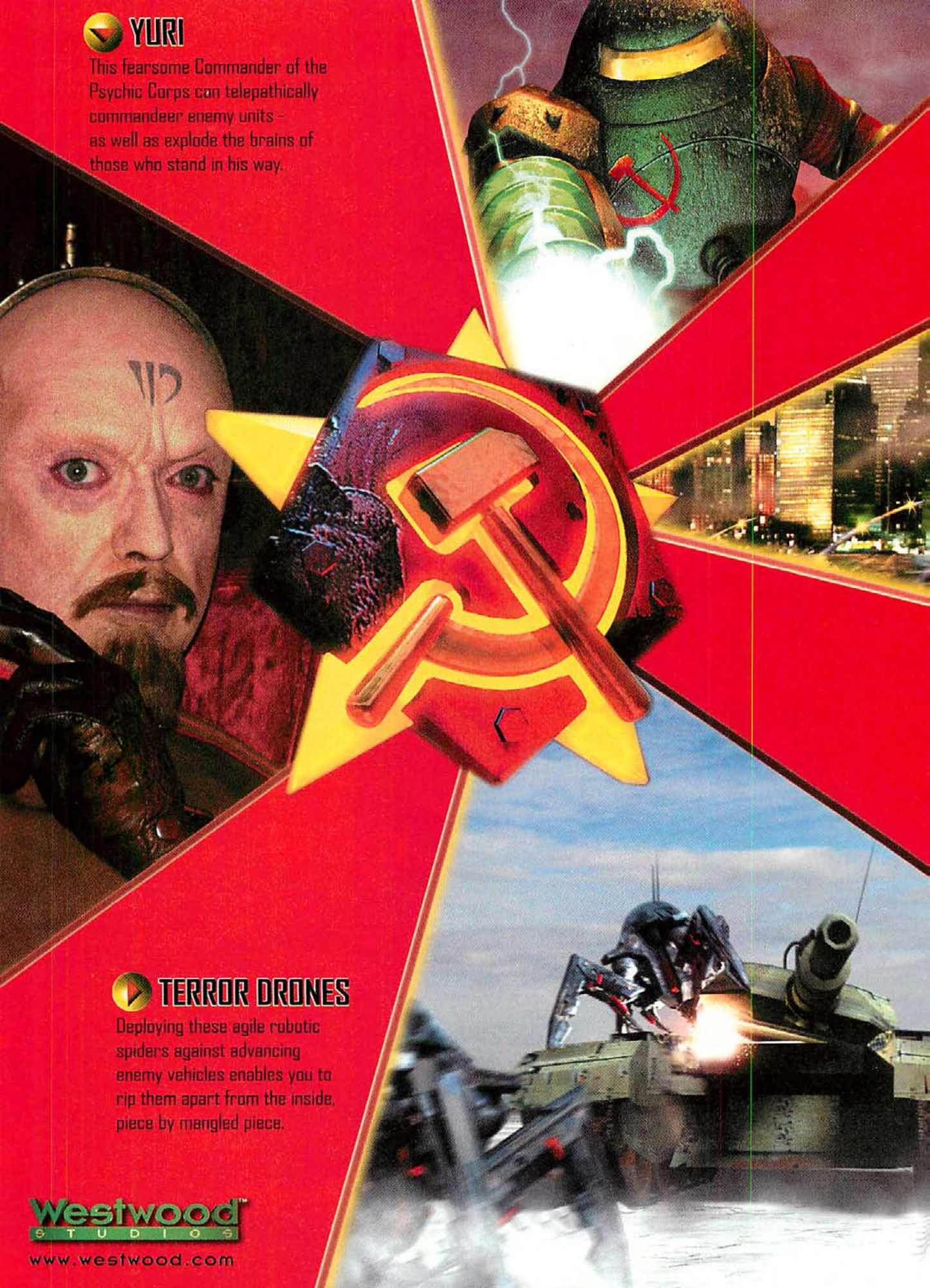
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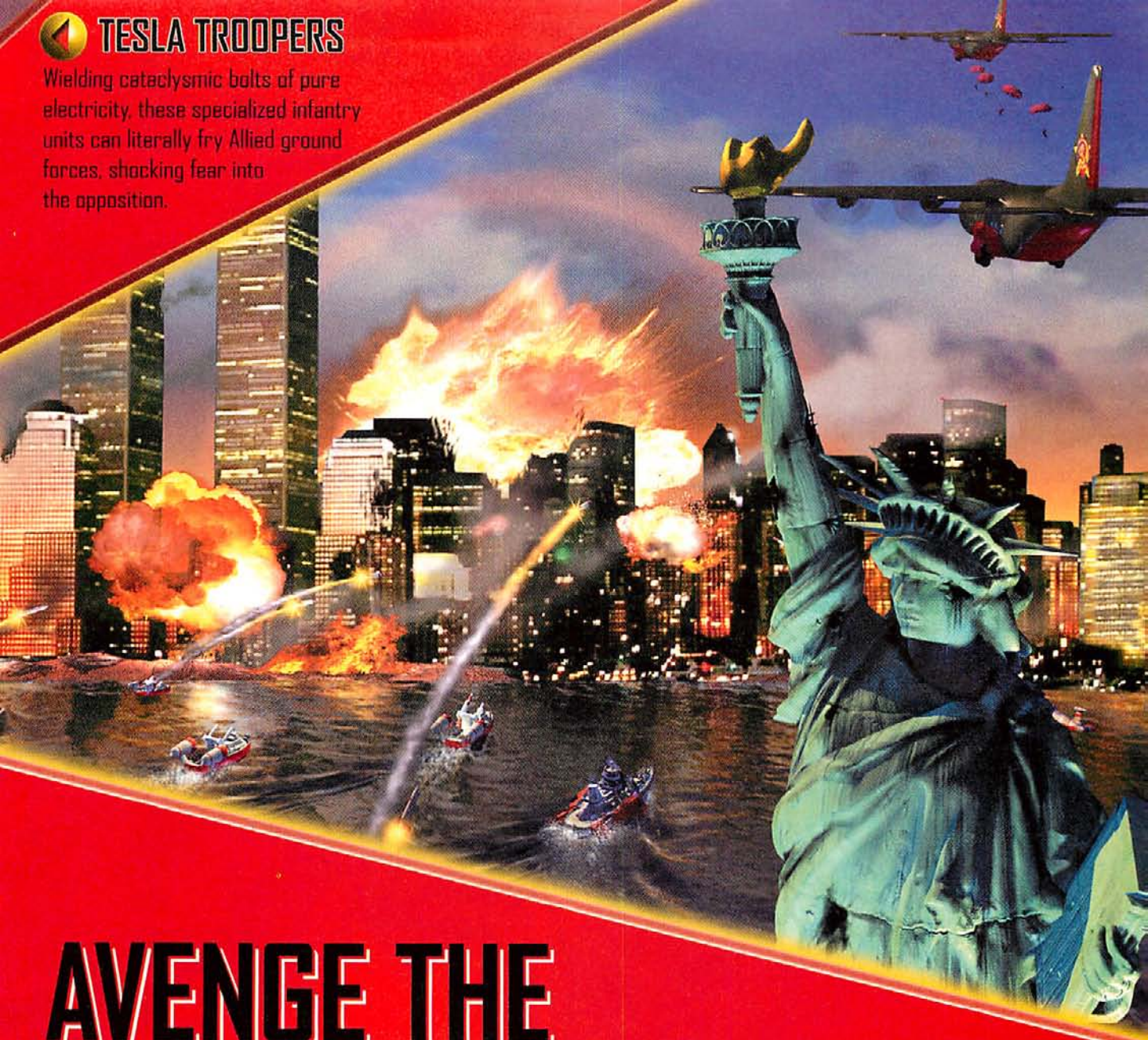
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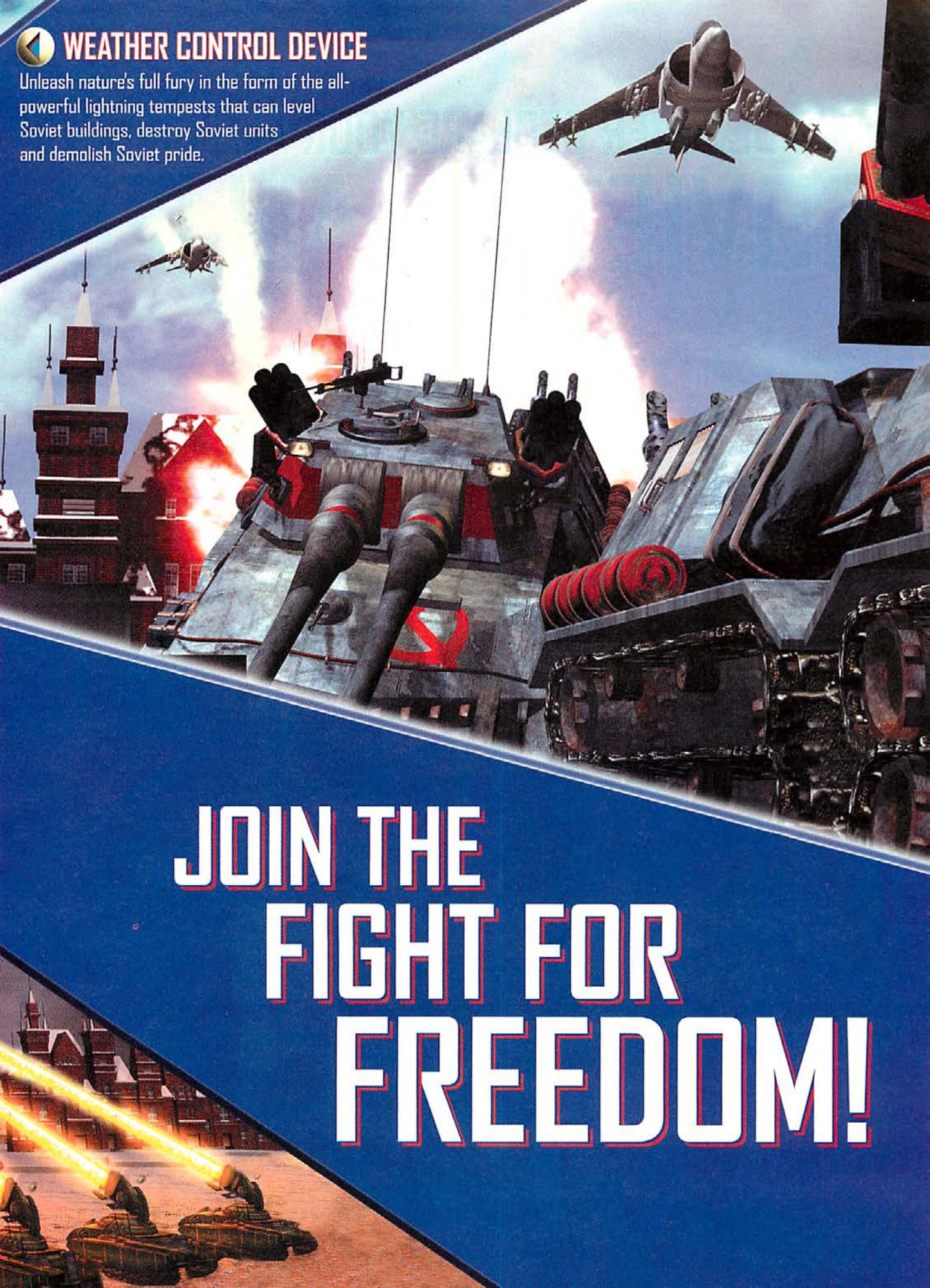
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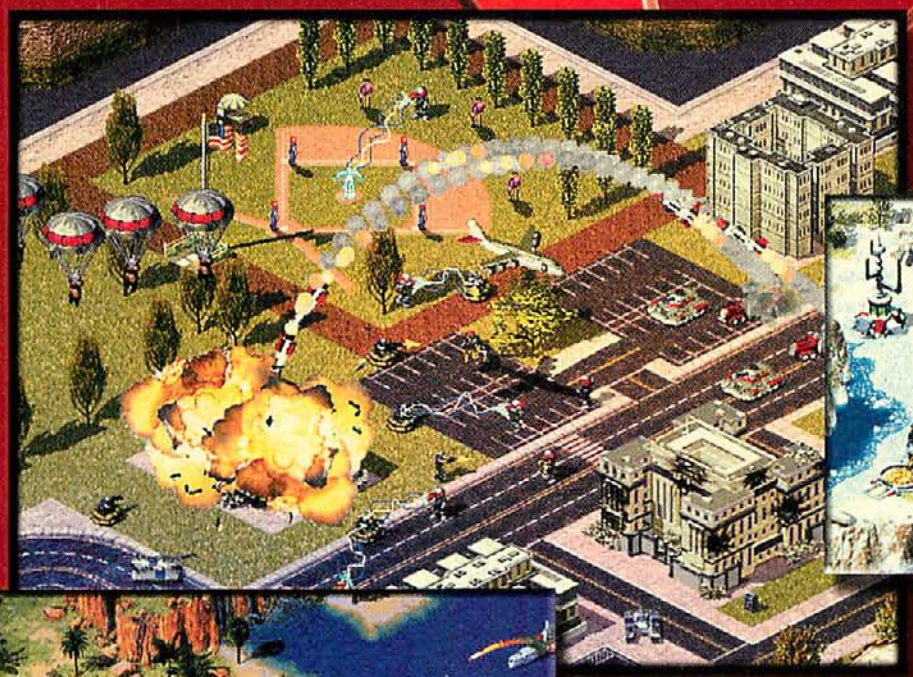
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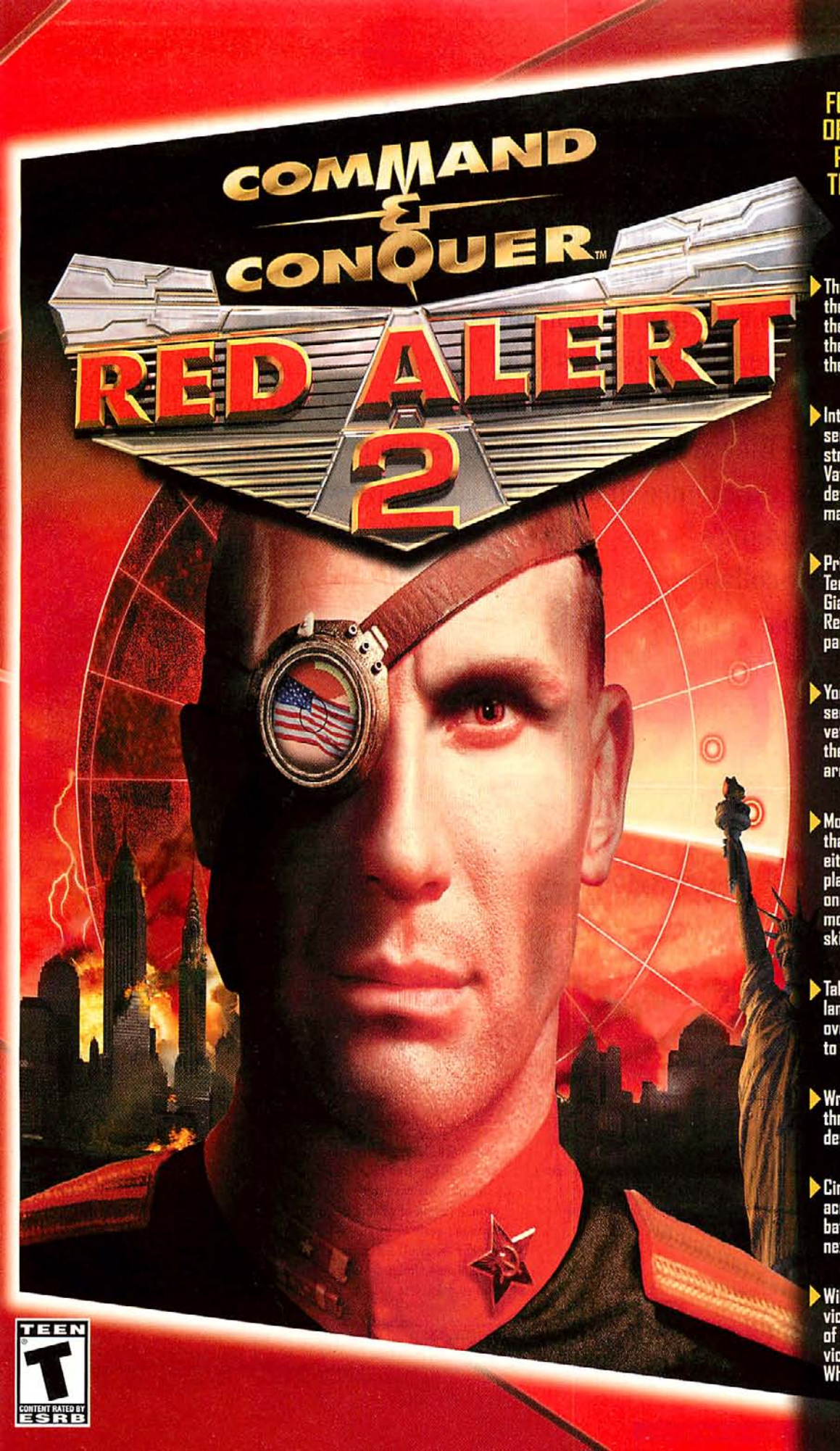




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- Will you lead an American victory parade in the streets of New York or host a Soviet victory celebration in the White House?

TEEN
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It is an unlikely home for a king.

This is the thought in your head as you stand on the sidewalk looking at an utterly nondescript office building on 82nd Avenue in Edmonton, Canada. Your quest has taken you thousands of miles, across an international border, to the far northern region of the continent, and now all you can think, as you approach the entrance, is: This is it?

But "unlikely" is perhaps the key word that you could use to describe everything about Bioware. Founded five years ago by two family doctors with no previous experience in designing games, Bioware is now indisputably one of gaming's royal elite. Their collaborations with Interplay's Black Isle Studios have created what is essentially a new role-playing dynasty, and their next move—releasing BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN—is easily one of the biggest events of the year.





HOW ABOUT WE JUST GIVE UP? Ray Muzyka, Feargus Urkuhart, and line producer Nathan Plewes gather for a typical bug-report session. As the countdown towards the ship date continues, they must prioritize tasks without compromising on the game's quality or playability.



How did this happen? How did a couple of Canadian M.D.s whose only previous programming experience was designing medical software like the "Gastroenterology Patient Simulator" end up at the top of the gaming heap? We braved the hostile American-Canadian border patrol and journeyed up to Edmonton to see them in action.

Complete Control

"The main ingredient of everyone here is that they're passionate about their work," said Dr. Ray Muzyka, who founded the company in 1995 with his friend Dr. Greg Zeschuk.

They would have to be. At the time of our visit, Bioware was in the final crunch period of getting BALDUR'S GATE II out the door, and, while they were not quite as insane as we had expected, there was still a *lot* of work to do. For the BG II team, the official office hours for the last couple months have been as follows: Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., and Saturday 12:00 to 6:00. That's 66 hours a week, if you're counting. But *they*

STORY BY JEFF GREEN • PHOTOS BY DARREN JACKNISKY

Dungeon Masters

With Baldur's Gate II, Black Isle and Bioware Complete Their Quest For The Role-Playing Crown

aren't. Many of the team members will stay much later than that, and play the game at home in their "off hours" to seek out as many bugs as possible.

"Almost everyone here is a tester on the game," said Muzyka." I play the game every night for around three hours, from midnight until 3:00 am. I try to find 20 bugs at a time and report them the next morning."

This is the kind of insanity that leads to success.

All these two doctors had between them when they opened Bioware's doors in 1995—other than that Gastroenterology Patient Simulator—was a shared passion for computer games, comics, and, as their first T-shirt proclaimed, "anything geeky." That passion has taken them far.

Bioware's first game was the Mechwarrior-style SHATTERED STEEL, released back in 1996—a decent but not spectacular debut. But the company hit it out of the park in 1998 when they partnered with Interplay's Black Isle Studios to produce BALDUR'S GATE, a gigantic RPG set in the *AD&D* Forgotten Realms world. Defying even the rosiest expectations, the game sold over one million copies, brought role-playing and *Dungeons and Dragons* back into the fore of computer gaming, and established the Bioware/Black Isle team as a major force in the industry. Since that game, Bioware's Infinity engine has been used to fuel three more highly acclaimed RPG's: the TALES OF THE SWORD COAST expansion, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and ICEWIND DALE.

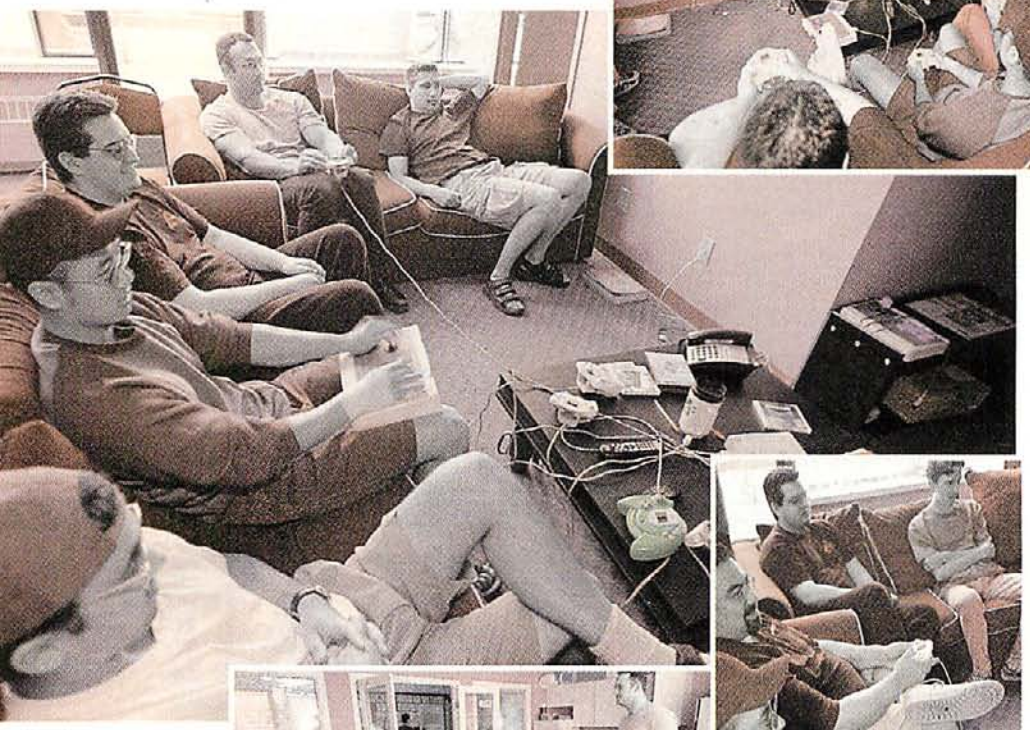
This year has seen Bioware take off even further. The company—now at nearly 100 employees—defied expectations again by developing one of the best action games of the year so far, MDK2. And they recently scored perhaps the ultimate coup—the chance to produce the first single-player RPG set in the *Star Wars* universe for LucasArts.

First, however, they must get BALDUR'S GATE II out the door. And now the pressure is on.

Career Opportunities

On this mid-August morning, the Bioware office is busy, but not out of control. Much of the staff, in fact, is not even working on BG II. Offices and cubes are full of t-shirted designers working on NEVERWINTER NIGHTS (see sidebar) and the PlayStation 2 version of MDK2; and hidden away in his office, away from the prying eyes of journalists, is art director John Gallagher, working on concept sketches for the *Star Wars* RPG. The relative calm is not what we expected.









BLOWING OFF STEAM Yes, employees do get to play games at work. It's a perk. SOUL CALIBER on the Dreamcast is the current game of choice.

"This project is definitely not as stressful as BALDURS GATE was," said co-lead designer James Ohlen. "We have long hours, 12 to 14 hours a day—but we don't have people sleeping over at work. With BG there were longer hours, a lot more stress, and tempers ran higher. We're a more mature company now."

The planning for BALDUR'S GATE II began immediately after they finished the first game. Muzyka, Ohlen, Gallagher, lead programmer Mark Darrah, Black Isle's Feargus Urkuhart and Chris Parker (see sidebar), and other team members conducted group meetings to plan the sequel. "We started with a list of design suggestions from fans, message boards, and internal ideas from here and Black Isle of all the things we'd like to see in a sequel," said Muzyka. "We had probably thousands of things on the list. We boiled it down to a list of a few hundred items that we felt would add a lot of value—and that list became the design document."

Among those core features were 800x600 resolution graphics, better AI scripting, a better journal, and an annotatable map. On a more general level, they wanted to expand the character and

Baldur's Gate II: a First Look

Doofaeus, Kensai warrior, shares his first impressions

by Jeff Green

So the one question we all want answered about BALDUR'S GATE II is: Does it live up to the hype? The definitive CGW answer: We don't know yet.

Although we originally hoped to review the game in this issue, Bioware was still tweaking and refining it as we went to press, so we didn't have final code. We did, however, have a beta with most of the game on it—so what follows here are some initial impressions. Be aware that I only made it as far as Chapter 2, and if Bioware's estimation of total possible gameplay is to be believed, then I have about, oh, 190 hours to go.



BALDUR'S GATE II features all new monsters to kill, including – at last – dragons. And Bioware is hinting that they aren't even the toughest creatures.

What's My Motivation?

As in the first game, you'll start BALDUR'S GATE II by creating one character. This time, instead of being a spell-less, staff-wielding weakling, all starting characters will begin with 89,000 XP, which will put you at 5th to 7th Level, depending on class. You can also import your party from either BG or TALES OF THE SWORD COAST, and your characters will be bumped up to the minimum 89,000 XP (though TALES characters could go all the way up to 161,000).

Most gamers are going to spend a lot of time on the character creation screen, because there is so much to choose from now. In addition to one new race (half-ore), Bioware has added three new classes (sorceror, barbarian, and monk), and best of all, a host of new kits that modify the classes in a variety of ways, allowing you to create much more specialized characters (see chart). The big bummer here, of course, is that you only get to make one character, which feels like a small letdown after being spoiled by the full-party creation in ICEWIND DALE. If the game is really 200 hours long, how many of us are going to replay it to try different kits? The good news is that, even as early as Chapter 1, you'll run into NPCs with kits who can join your party—so you'll still get to play around with them even if you didn't create them yourself.

And the fact is, it's a trade-off that BGII needs to make for the sake of the story, in which the NPCs play a huge role, with far more scripting than in the first game. I am going to refrain from giving plot spoilers here, because Bioware has really upped the storytelling, and there's one major twist involving one of your party members very early on in the game.

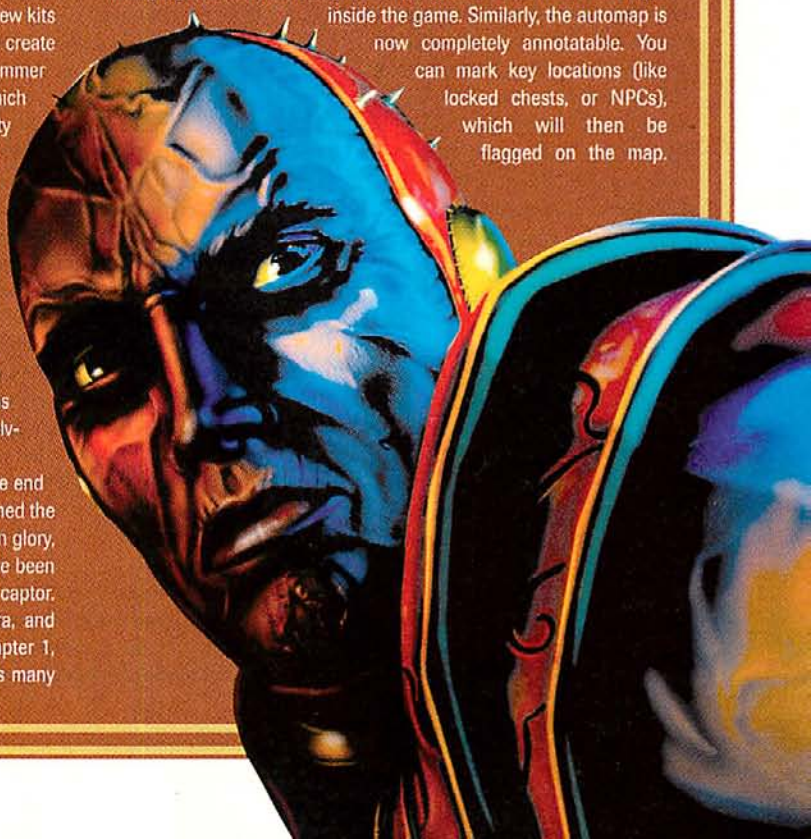
I'll tell you this much: The game opens just months after the end of BG, in which you have destroyed the evil Sarevok—and learned the nature of your own ancestry. Although you ended that game in glory, you start the sequel imprisoned in a dungeon, where you have been suffering brutal experimentation at the hands of an unknown captor. Also imprisoned: your old friends Minsc (and Boo), Jahiera, and Imoen. Getting out of this dungeon is the basic goal of Chapter 1, and while not exactly earth-shatteringly original, it highlights many of the new game's strengths.

Go for the Eyes, Boo!

First of all, there's the graphics. Screenshots can't really do it justice, but the switch to 800x600 resolution has made a huge difference (and gives a glimpse as to what might have been with DIABLO II...). The level of detail is amazing—and coupled with some nice animation—has really made this world come alive. It also proves just how beautiful a 2D game can still be.

The interface changes are welcome, solid ideas across-the-board. They're little things, but cumulatively, they make a big difference. The Rest button, for one thing, is now prominently displayed on the left panel rather than being buried like it was in the first game. All three panels are now toggle-able, so you can play the game in full-screen mode, or with any combination of panels displayed. Hitting Pause will automatically bring up the panels you last had displayed—making it simple to get yourself ready for combat.

The journal is now so much better that it reinforces just how lousy the one in the first game was. There are now separate tabs for active and completed quests, critical path notes, and player comments. Yes, someone finally figured out that it might be nice to take notes in an RPG right inside the game. Similarly, the automap is now completely annotatable. You can mark key locations (like locked chests, or NPCs), which will then be flagged on the map.



The Brains Behind Black Isle

While BALDUR'S GATE 2 is primarily the result of the hands-on work of the folks at Bioware, we shouldn't downplay the importance of the team at Black Isle Studios, who have co-produced the BALDUR'S GATE games, and developed both PLANESCAPE: TORMENT and ICEWIND DALE in-house at Interplay.

Though not nearly as well known as other higher-profile game designers in the business, both Division Director Feargus Urkuhart and Senior Producer Chris Parker have emerged as two of the most important RPG developers around. Here's what they have to say for themselves.

Interview With Feargus Urkuhart
Black Isle's Division Director

Who are you and why should we care?
I'm the Division Director for Black Isle Studios. I manage all of Black Isle's internal and external products and I sometimes play at being a designer, as with FALLOUT 2. My main responsibility is making sure that Black Isle products live up to what we have done in the past, and that we continually evolve in what we develop.

How do you explain your incredible success the last few years? All of a sudden, beginning with FALLOUT, Interplay has produced one great RPG after another. What changed?
The main change at Interplay was the division of development that started to occur in 1996. With the founding of the Black Isle division, we were able to focus on making RPGs and only RPGs. Then after FALLOUT, even with the departure of a number of Black Isle employees over to Troika [now working on ARCANUM–Ed.], we've been able to have a relatively stable development staff, allowing us to take what we've learned and apply that to future games. We have also been very lucky in our relationship with Bioware, in that we've been able to work very closely with them and with the engine they created for the original BALDUR'S GATE, the Bioware Infinity Engine. Coupled with our focus, I think we've also been successful because we've been relatively careful about the technological scope of our products. We realize that the success of an RPG is based in the gameplay and the content created for it, and not always in the technology. So, we have focused our efforts on delivering the best content, in engines that are as new as possible–but are not on the bleeding edge.



Were you a big D&D player in real life? If so–describe your character in your current (or favorite) campaign.
I've played *D&D/AD&D* since I was about 12. However, the longest campaign that I played in was actually a SHADOWRUN game. My character in that was a Dwarven Street Samurai named SPUD! who had two things on his mind: money and finding out where to get more money.

3rd-Edition rules: cool beans, or a fiasco? What are the best/most exciting things about the rule changes to you? Does anything suck?
After reading through the Player's Handbook two or three times, I can pretty much say that it is probably the best thing that has ever happened to *D&D*. The rules are much more modern and in a word, it's just smoother. The best thing, though, is that it is still *D&D*. Wizards of the Coast was able to update the rules without losing the things that make it feel like the game I've played for almost 20 years.

Will you play BG2, or are you sick of it already?
Actually I'm playing it right now. A small confession I have is that I never got past Chapter 5 in the original BG, but I'm hoping to finish BG2 before it comes out.

combat systems to incorporate more detailed *AD&D* rules, tighten the playing experience by eliminating much of the first game's random wandering, and expand the game's settings and storyline into unexpected areas—like the Underdark—that would please the hardcore faithful.

They've been working on it for over a year now, stretching the game engine's capabilities, rendering all new artwork, and creating a storyline and enough subquests to keep you busy, if they are to be believed, for upwards of 200 hours. Now, at the end of the line, the team is exuding the confidence of those who know that they've achieved their goals. "We've done all of it, said Muzyka. "We've put in every single feature we planned on from the beginning."

Clampdown

But how does a company really know that their game doesn't suck? They play it. They test it, over and over, for literally thousands of hours, looking for everything that isn't working, could be better, or just flat out stinks. And this has been the life of the BALDUR'S GATE 2 team for months now.



I MUST NOT GO POSTAL For lead programmer Mark Darrah, BALDUR'S GATE 2 is not a game, but an endless stream of code. Be glad he takes it out on SOUL CALIBER.

Playing their own game, endlessly. It's a huge job—and not as much fun as it sounds.

On the wall outside Muzyka's office is a gigantic whiteboard with a chart of every single area and subquest in the entire game. Each area not verified as being 100-percent complete and bug free is marked with an X. On this day in August, there are 52 X's remaining.

Verifying whether things are working correctly is primarily the job of the Quality Assurance (QA) department, who are basically paid to play the game and to do everything they can to try to break it. Along with Bioware's QA department, Interplay has sent a six-person QA team of their own to Edmonton, and they also have four more

This player-character is a 7th-level half-orc Kensai warrior – representing both a new race and class in BG2. His Kai ability inflicts maximum butt-kicking once a day for 10 seconds.





One of the first NPCs who can join your party is this specialized thief, a bounty hunter. He's excellent at setting traps.

Spell effects are enhanced with OpenGL if you have a 3D card. It's not required, but it's worth it.





One of the advantages of playing evil is the ability to wear fine garments such as this, the ever-popular flesh armor.



Upon entering a new town, you will now automatically receive a map with all the key locations already marked, eliminating the drudgery of seeking out each important building.

The game's plot is played out in numerous in-game cut-scenes, which are well-written enough to be interesting, and not so long as to bore you.





Again, these are small changes but help remove a lot of the frustration, guesswork, and busywork from the first game.

All of the Black Isle RPGs have featured stellar written dialogue and voice acting, and BALDUR'S GATE II, at least through Chapter 2, maintains that tradition. Written dialogue is now broken up into smaller chunks of just a couple sentences per screen, which will come as a relief to anyone overwhelmed by PLANESCAPE: TORMENT's daunting blocks of text. The voice work is outstanding as always, and those who loved Minsc in the first game will be happy to know that he is as ridiculously over-the-top as before.

For Hire Fallen

Combat works just as in the first game, but the combination of the new kits and the higher starting-level point make the early battles more interesting right from the start. My character, a half-orc Kensai warrior, is a phenomenal butt-kicker. He gets no missile weapons or armor, but his Kai special ability makes up for everything, allowing him to inflict maximum damage for 10 seconds, once a day, on all attacks. The first NPC I picked up, Yoshimo, was a thief bounty hunter with very high-level trap settings and the ability to set special traps.

It's too early for me to comment definitively on subquests, though I can say that through a good portion of Chapter 2, there is already much to do–and none are FedEx quests. Random wandering-around time seems to have been all but eliminated. And getting to the first town after the opening dungeon reveals another of the new game's joys: a town map with every key location already marked. Pathfinding, another of the first game's weaknesses, is greatly improved. I conducted numerous experiments, and in almost every case, every party member went the right way, making intelligent moves to get out of each other's way.

Final Answer?

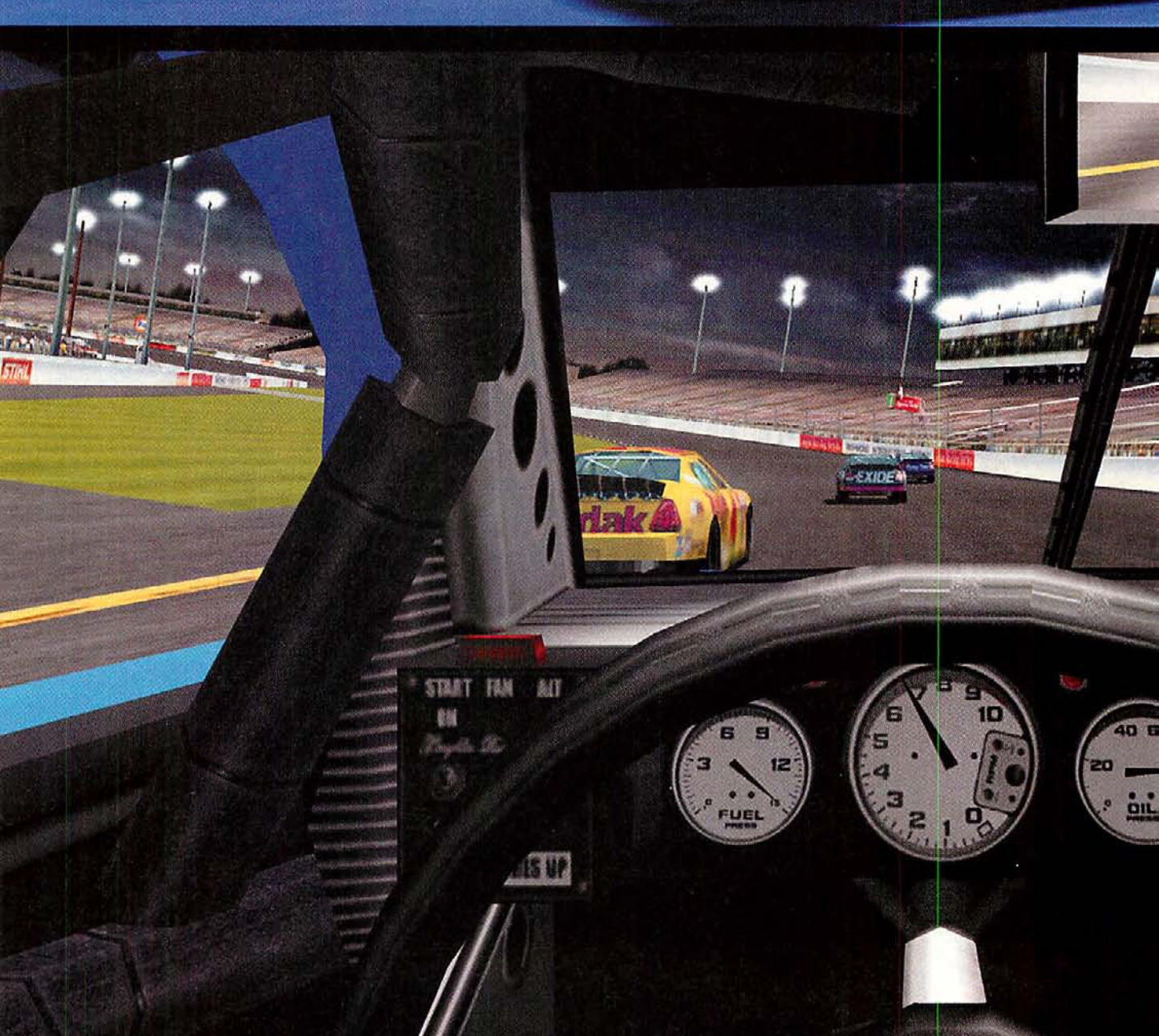
But don't take my word on any of this. If you have this magazine's CD, play the demo yourself. I can't pass judgment until I see if the next 190 hours hold up to the first 10 I've played, but from what I've seen so far, BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN is going to be everything Black Isle fans have been craving and hoping for, and then some. CGW



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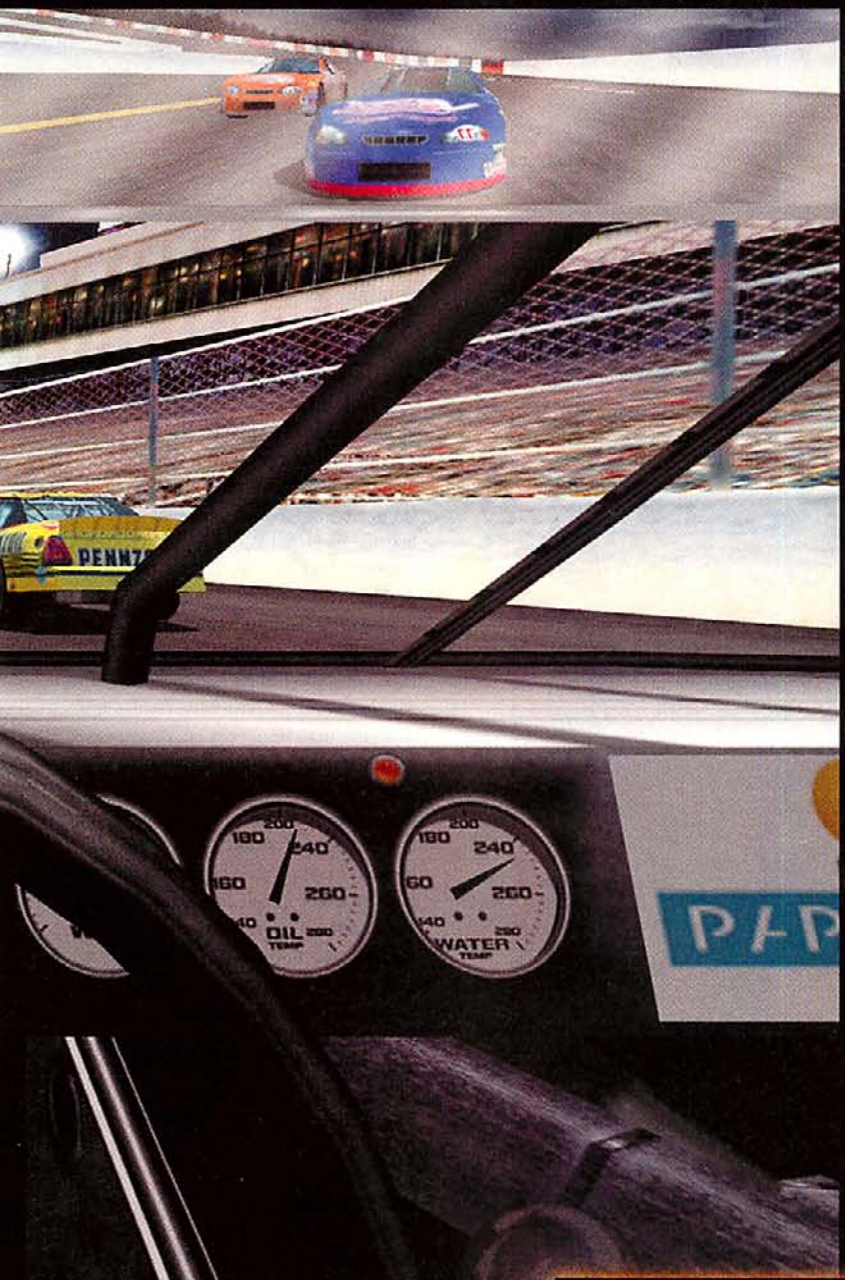
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really depends on where you sit.









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Interview With Chris Parker
Black Isle's BALDUR'S GATE 2 Producer

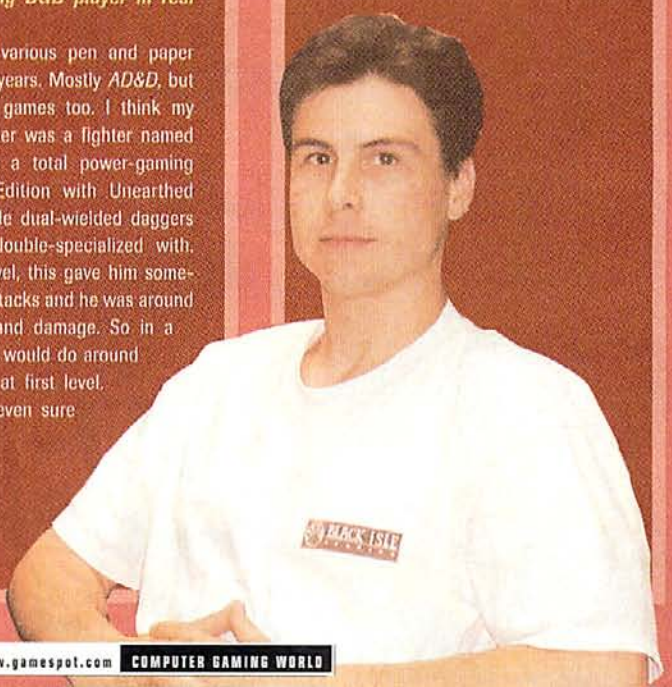
Who are you and why should we care?
I'm Chris Parker, a Senior Producer in Black Isle Studios, and to be perfectly honest I really don't have any idea why anyone would care. But I have been the producer on BALDUR'S GATE, TALES OF THE SWORD COAST, ICEWIND DALE, and BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN.

What were your responsibilities on BG2? What does a producer do? Is it kind of like a movie director?
My responsibility is BALDUR'S GATE II. I primarily coordinate, communicate, and approve in all areas of bringing the game to the shelf. I work with PR (press and public relations), marketing (creation of ads, box materials, promotional materials, etc.), quality assurance (game testing), audio (music, VO, SFX), and anybody else that does anything for BGII or Black Isle at Interplay. I work with Wizard of the Coast because of the Forgotten Realms license. I work with Bioware on essentially all aspects of development, but they actually do all of the design, art, and programming. In the end, I am basically personally responsible for the whole ball of wax.

Were you a big D&D player in real life?
I have played various pen and paper RPGs over the years. Mostly *AD&D*, but a lot of other games too. I think my favorite character was a fighter named Jered. He was a total power-gaming character–1st-Edition with Unearthed Arcana rules. He dual-wielded daggers that he was double-specialized with. Even at first level, this gave him something like 5/2 attacks and he was around +4/+7 To Hit and damage. So in a good round, he would do around 20-30 damage at first level. Hehe. I'm not even sure the rules actually allowed that, but they did when I was 15...I had a lot of fun with that character. He died a lot.

3rd-Edition rules: cool beans, or a fiasco? What are the best/most exciting things about the rule changes to you? Does anything suck?
I like the 3rd-Edition rules a lot. I actually did some beta testing on them last year and I thought they were great. The overall changes to combat make the game both more intriguing and quicker to play, which was one of my old complaints about 2nd Edition. In 2nd Edition, your combat options for a fighter type were basically move and attack–but if you were a thief, you wondered if you wanted to hide in shadows before you moved or attacked, etc. In 3rd Edition, you can do all this semi-complex stuff, but it's all blended into a pretty swank system.

Will you play BG2, or are you sick of it already?
I will probably still be working on my current game of BG2. I've been working on it for about two weeks and I haven't gotten out of Chapter 2 yet! I don't know how long it would take to get sick of it. There are so many levels and branches of complexity that you could probably play through it five times and still be finding stuff you had no idea was even there. I'm not even remotely sick of it yet–playing it is actually the part of my job I look forward to the most.





PIZZA AGAIN Today's lunch haul. The BG2 staff is working 12-hour days Monday through Friday, meaning they'll eat most meals together. Unlike during the first game, it's not always pizza. "It didn't occur to me that I could order anything else," said boss Ray Muzyka.

six-person teams testing the game back in California.

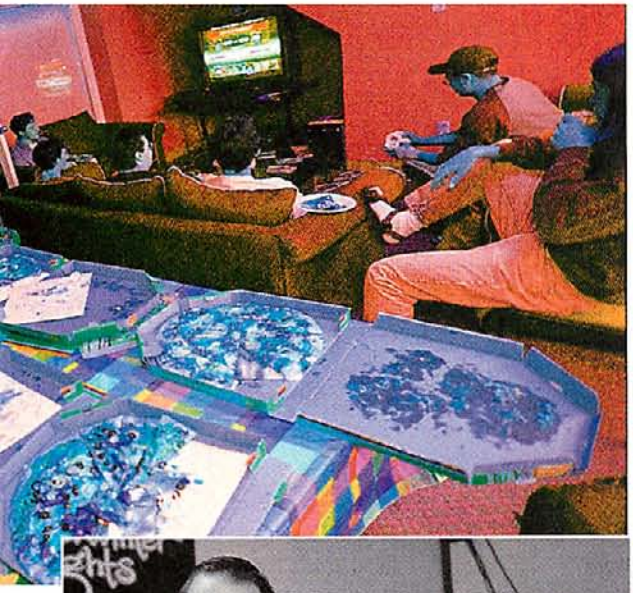
According to QA lead Scott Langevin, each member of Bioware's QA team is assigned an area, and is responsible for ensuring that that area is as bug free as possible—a process that he said takes about a week, on average. More than one QA person will look at one area, of course, because as he put it, "14 eyes are better than two, and each set is going to look at a problem with a different perspective."

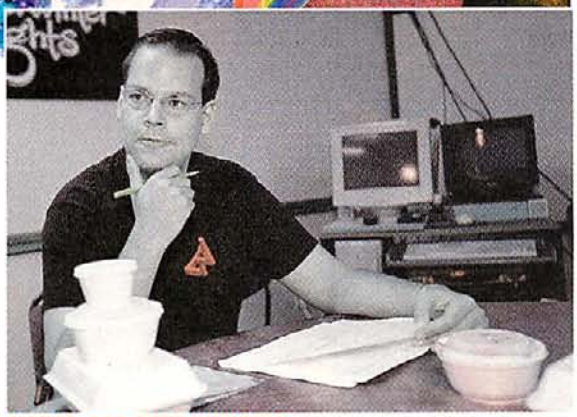
Bioware generates weekly builds of the game, along with daily updates, and QA must constantly check and recheck whether problems have been fixed—or if new ones have been created. Every person testing the game—from QA and elsewhere, at both Bioware and Black Isle—fills out a bug report every day, and it's then the unenviable task of line producer Nathan Plewes to compile all the reports into a massive Excel spreadsheet, and then sort and distribute the reports to the appropriate designers and programmers for fixing.

"It's not terribly glamorous," admits Plewes. "There's a large misconception about what it's like to work at a game company. I know that when I first started I was thinking, 'All right! I'll get to play video games!' But this *[pointing to the spreadsheet]* is what I do all day."

Pressure Drop

The QA guys *do* get to play the game, but quite often, they're playing the same small area, over and over, for hours on end. As Muzyka describes it, "The QA people don't just verify that the game works and is fun, they have to go all through every scene trying every crazy thing they can think of to break it—attacking the people they're talking to, or casting spells in the middle of a





PLEASE, RAY, STOP WORKING Even during lunch, Bioware co-leader Ray Muzyka is marking up a bug report.

dialogue—and only when they've successfully gone from start to end trying every crazy thing is that area considered 'finished'. Then, we immediately re-test."

The QA team is also solicited for their opinions of the game. It's a known, notorious fact in the games industry that QA departments are often treated as second-class citizens. They're often entry-level employees who are "just" playing the game, and quite often their comments and criticisms are not appreciated, or even listened to by those "higher up"—as all those crappy games on your shelf prove. But this kind of class division does not appear to exist at Bioware.

"We always listen to QA," said designer Ohlen. "They're really representative of the people who are going to be playing the game. If they don't like something, well, no matter how much fun you thought it was going to be, there must be something wrong with it."

The most recent change came with the endgame. "Just a week and a half ago someone here told me the end of the game sucked," said Ohlen. "I asked a couple other people and they thought it sucked too. So I took a general survey and it turned out that everyone but one guy thought it sucked. They all liked the *idea* of the end, the final battle, but said it went on too long—so I shortened it. When everyone is saying the same thing, you have to listen."

At this late date, however, the team is mostly past any qualitative changes. The emphasis now is on squashing bugs. And there are lots of them. Random game crashes. Impossibly tough monsters. Placeholder sounds (like helicopters) not yet removed. So the 12-hour days continue, the bug reports keep shuffling from desk to desk, and the whiteboard slowly gets those X's removed.

Up Next:
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

We check in with NWN producer Trent Oster

■■■ BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN is currently getting all the attention, but for many role-players, their next RPG, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, is even more exciting—due mainly to the limitless multiplayer capabilities (see our July 2000 cover story). We checked in with the game's producer, Trent Oster, to see how it's moving along.

How's it going? About how far along in production of NWN are you now? 20%? 50%? 33.3%?

I would rate the development on NWN at about 60% right now. We've nailed down most of the issues and have technical solutions for problems we've encountered in the past. The big task ahead is primarily implementation.

What are the latest, coolest things you guys have been implementing recently? What are you most excited about right now in the game?

The combat system really has me excited. Early on in the project, I spoke about getting away from the "Flintstones boxing" model of combat, where I swing, then you swing. We've done exactly what I planned out in the beginning: Players will parry, dodge, and interact with each other in a plausible combat setting. If you miss your attack, it will be because your opponent dodged the blow, shrugged it off their armor, or parried it with a weapon of their own. The entire system gives combat a much more dynamic feel and makes it a lot more fun to engage in.

Are there plans for an open beta test, and if so, when might we start hearing about it?

We've discussed an open beta for NEVERWINTER and we are quite excited about the idea. As to when a beta test would open up, it will be some time yet. When we're ready, we'll post a sign-up sheet on our Web page at **www.neverwinternights.com**.

How many modules do you think are going to ship with the game to get people started? And are you worried at all that there won't be enough to keep people going before they start creating their own? Or do you think we'll start seeing user mods instantly?

We are planning on around 25-30 modules shipping with the game. These modules will mostly be linked into our campaign and will serve as our main story for NEVERWINTER NIGHTS. As for user-made modules, the toolset's so friendly that I expect the first few dungeon crawls to start appearing literally within hours of the game's release. It will take time before the full power of the toolset is really understood and utilized, of course, so it may be a little while before high-quantity, high-quality, user-created content



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"As this project is winding down, said Ohlen, we're getting a lot of programming bugs that we didn't expect, since this is not a new engine. But we've modified the engine in so many different ways—scripting language, how spells work—that there's still a lot to do.

Programmer Mark Darrah agreed with the others that the situation is far less tense than with BALDUR'S GATE, and that a new engine would have presented much more serious problems. "The stress is there," he said, "but I've had no major breakdowns yet."

Death or Glory

Throughout our day at Bioware, we witness the same attitude in every department: confidence and optimism tempered only by fatigue and the desire to be done. There's no backbiting. No infighting. After all these hours, no one appears to hate anyone else, or, more surprisingly, the game itself. Of everyone we talked to, only one—Ohlen, the game's co-designer and the one perhaps most familiar with every detail of the game—says he won't play it when it comes out.

Some, like programmer Darrah, are actively looking forward to it. "I didn't play BG because it couldn't run on my machine at home, but I'll probably upgrade so I can play this one," he said. "The programmers have the advantage of not really knowing the story so well—we're just looking at it in bits and pieces."

For Dr. Ray Muzyka, neither the 12-hour days, nor the graveyard-shift play testing (while also trying to finish up an M.B.A.), nor the pressure of trying to live up to the gaming community's very high expectations have remotely softened his enthusiasm for or confidence in the game. "We really like to think of BALDUR'S GATE 2 as the only game you'll need to buy this year."

It's not arrogance. It's just a sincere statement of belief from a man who knows his company is at the top of its game.

As we leave Bioware at the end of the day and march off to experience the joys of high-alcohol Canadian beer, we are left with this final thought: There is no magic formula to what makes a great game or a great game company. There are only people. Get the right combination of them together, and that's when things start to happen. Right now, there's some serious magic happening up in Edmonton. CGW

Bioware by the Numbers

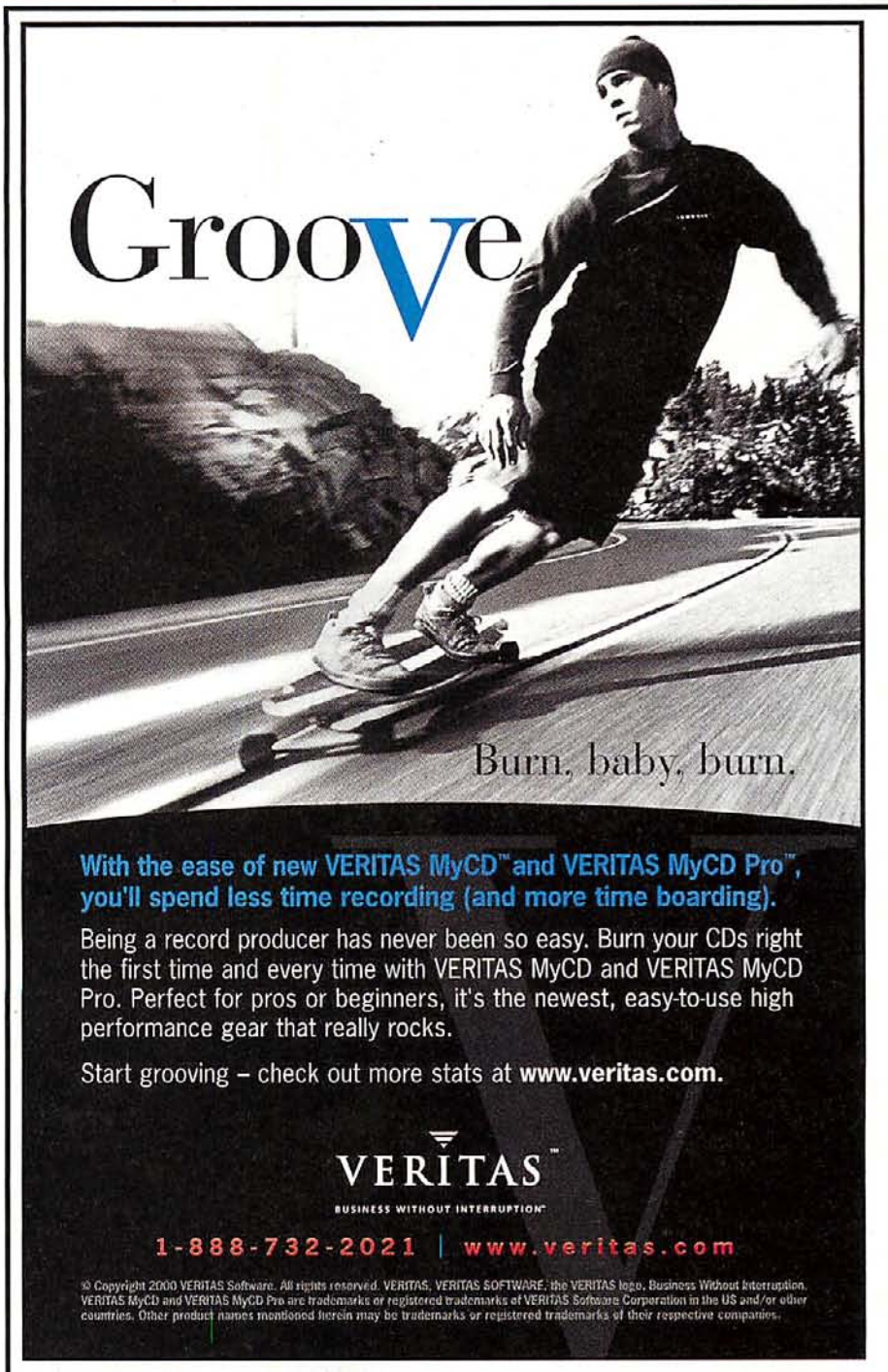
- Number of total Bioware employees: **96**
- Number of Bioware employees on the BG2 team: **between 20-35**
- Estimated number of total person-hours spent working on BG2: **55 years**
- Number of BG2 team members who finished BG1 (as game players): **15**
- Estimated number of pizzas consumed at the office during BG2 production: **1500 (conservative)**
- Estimated number of hours team members have spent playing BG2: **many thousands**
- Number of nights slept at office: **none**
- Number of nights slept at office during BG1 production: **40 to 50**
- Estimated number of bugs fixed so far during beta-testing: **over 10,000**

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS continued

becomes readily available to everyone. We're looking forward to it when it comes, as there's no greater reward for us than a tale-well-told with our engine.

Have there been any fundamental changes to how you envision multiplayer sessions to work since we last checked in? Is everything going according to plan?
NEVERWINTER is proceeding exactly as we planned it. With a concept this large, you often hear talks of cuts in the scope of the project and feature elimination. We are not going that route. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a huge concept with a massive feature list, and we are going to ship the game we've come to believe in, not some cut-down version.

When can we start playing?
When we finish it. Our target release date is Q2 01. CGW





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Springtime for Gamers

More Winter for ICEWIND DALE Expansion

■■■ The Groundhog of Doom has seen his shadow, heralding in several more levels of winter in ICEWIND DALE. Encouraged by the early sales success of their traditional hack-n-slasher, Black Isle has begun work on ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER, an expansion planned to ship in...the heart of winter.

HEART OF WINTER will take players deeper into the belly of ICEWIND DALE, and will center on the city of Lonelywood—one of the Ten Towns central to the R. Salvator novel upon which the game is based. The main plot involves an uprising of Barbarian tribes, which threatens to sweep the Dale clean of all hygienic and cultured peoples. Throughout the course of the adventure, players will explore barbarian culture, visiting a barbarian town, war camp, and burial isle while seeking out the origin of the barbarians' uppity antics.

Of course, there will be a slew of additions and improvements, including:

- 800x600 display support
- gem bags and scroll cases to keep inventories tidy and to allow more space for loot.
- DIABLO II-style hotkeys for locating objects on the ground and hidden doors.
- experience-point cap raised to 2.9 million (19th-level fighters, 17th-level wizards)
- 40-60 new high-level spells, including Earthquake and Spiritual Wrath
- the complete elimination of combat (kidding!)

The design team also promises some inventive new monsters and a couple twists that they're keeping strictly hush-hush. CGW



WINTER OF OUR DISC CONTENT
Black Isle is hard at work turning this concept art for the town of Lonelywood into a lovely and cozy holiday hash-n-slash resort.



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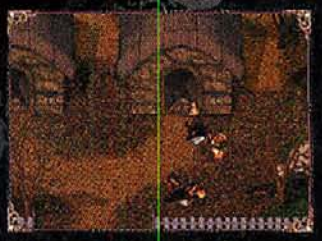
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Let There Be Lith!

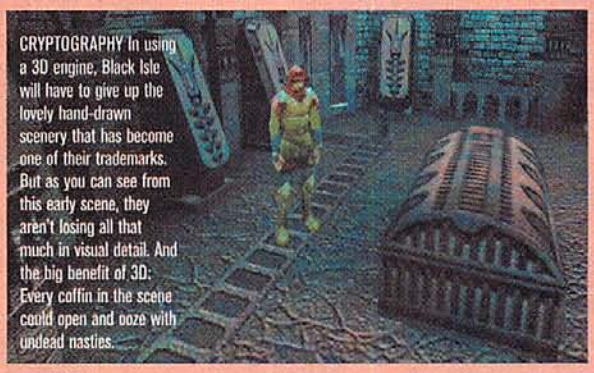
PLANESCAPE Team Has a New Project

■■■ Black Isle has made their name turning the universe of *AD&D* into rock-solid games. But that, apparently, is no longer good enough. Now they want to create their own universe from the halflings up.

The team that brought us PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, the *CGW* 1999 Role-Playing Game of the Year, is now six months into a quest to forge their own original high-fantasy universe using the LithTech 3D engine.

Few solid details are available on the game at this point, but we do know this: The universe will not stray far from traditional high fantasy, and will include the usual cast of characters—including ye olde dwarves, halflings, and elves. The rules will be an expanded version of the S.P.E.C.I.A.L. system used in the FALLOUT games, so it will have a well-developed skill system. The player will control a single character who can acquire companions throughout the game, just as in BALDUR'S GATE.

There will be multiplayer play. And the LithTech 3D engine will be used to render the world from an isometric perspective.



CRYPTOGRAPHY In using a 3D engine, Black Isle will have to give up the lovely hand-drawn scenery that has become one of their trademarks. But as you can see from this early scene, they aren't losing all that much in visual detail. And the big benefit of 3D: Every coffin in the scene could open and ooze with undead nasties.

This world-creation business is a tall order. Few computer game developers have succeeded in creating original fantasy universes, and no one has done it in the past 10 years. But if anyone has a shot at success, it's the current kings of the computer RPG world. More news as this world emerges from the void... CGW

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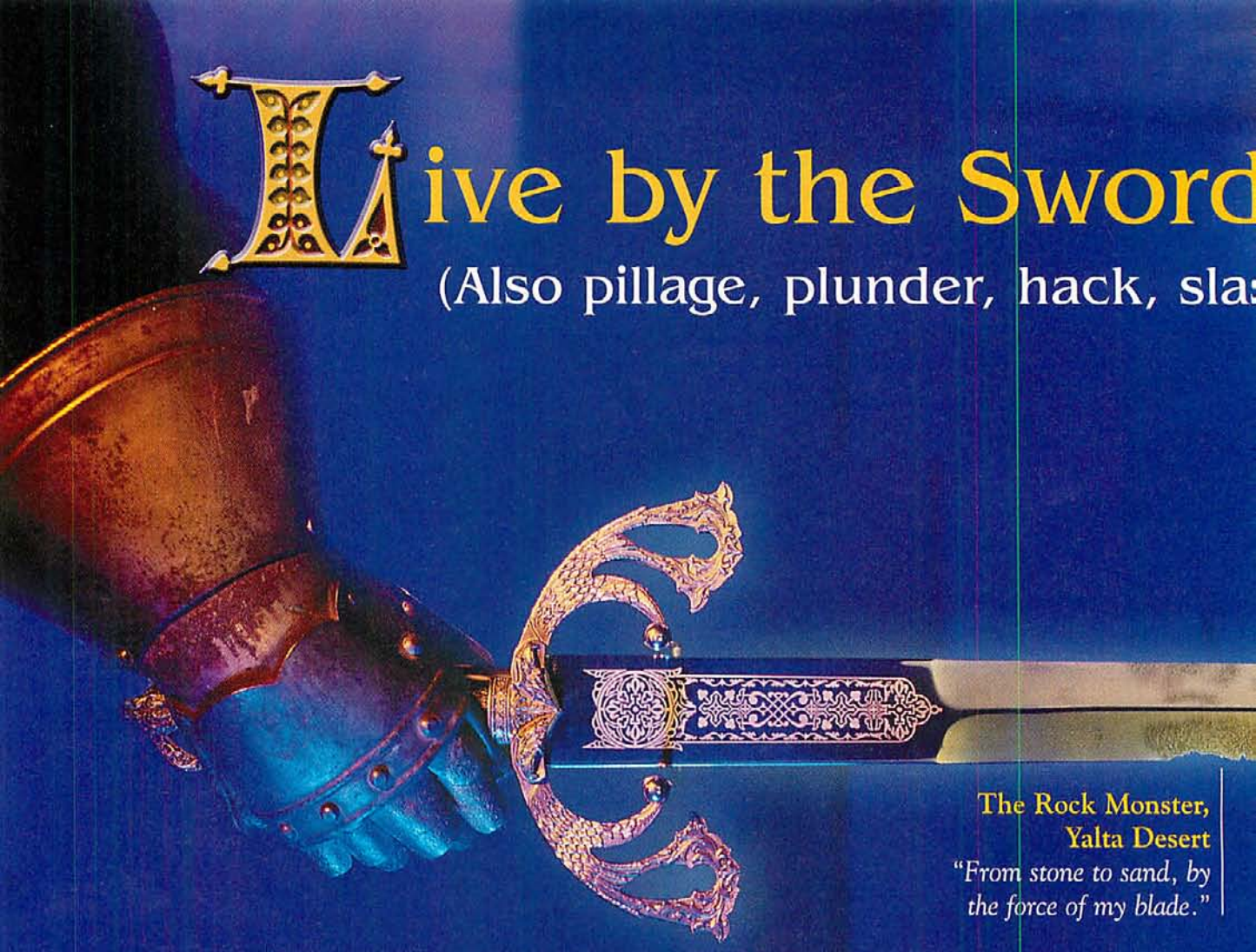
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Live by the Sword

(Also pillage, plunder, hack, sla



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Legend of The Blade Masters







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and conquer by the sword.)

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"If only her exoskeleton was as tough as her will."



Otanka Onslaught, Kelta
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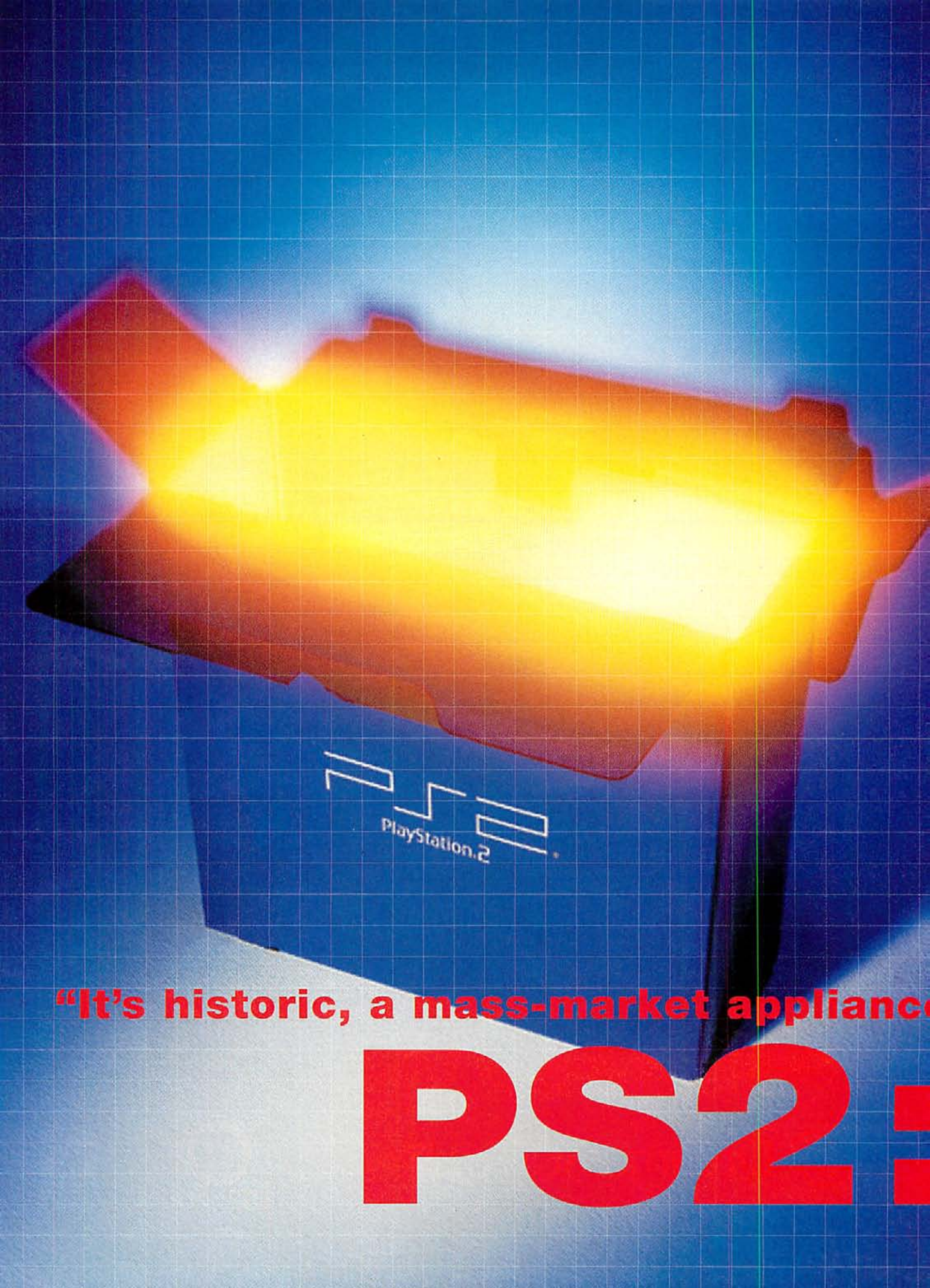
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"It's historic, a mass-market appliance

PS2:

SO WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TURN ON THE PS2?

Well, first, of course, you have the nifty new start-up sequence (far right), and if you have a PS1, PS2, or DVD disc in the system it will automatically load. But if there's nothing in the system, or the drive tray is open, you go to the new system menu where you have three choices: Browser, System Configuration, and Version.

THE BROWSER

No, not Netscape—this isn't that type of Browser. This is where you mess with everything hooked up to your PS2: Any memory cards, PocketStations, DVD video discs, audio CDs, PS1 or PS2 games in the system will appear here as little icons. If you select a memory card, you will go to the memory card management screen: Select any software and it will load. Presumably other peripherals, such as hard drives, modems, and other extras will also be accessed through here in the future.



UTILITY DISK

The only CD that comes packed in with the PlayStation2 isn't a bunch of game demos (as was previously promised), but more or less an electric version of the instruction manual. It walks you through the use of various parts of the hardware, and also includes a short sample of DVD video and the PS2's DVD player driver so you can reinstall it to your memory card if you need to.



The controller ports and memory card slots, all the same size and shape as on the original PlayStation. Only two sets? Yup. Sony says they didn't include more controller ports in order to keep costs low.

The good ol' PlayStation logo, which you can rotate easily to suit a vertical or horizontal configuration.

The light in the Reset button glows red when the system is idle, and green when it is active. The eject button has a blue light that flashes when the drive is opening or closing.

You might recognize these little buggers called USB ports—they come standard on modern PCs. All kinds of peripherals—mice, keyboards, scanners, printers, cameras, hard drives—can plug in here, quick and easy.

The IEEE 1394 interface port PS2 an incredi

that fundamentally changes society in

THE SY

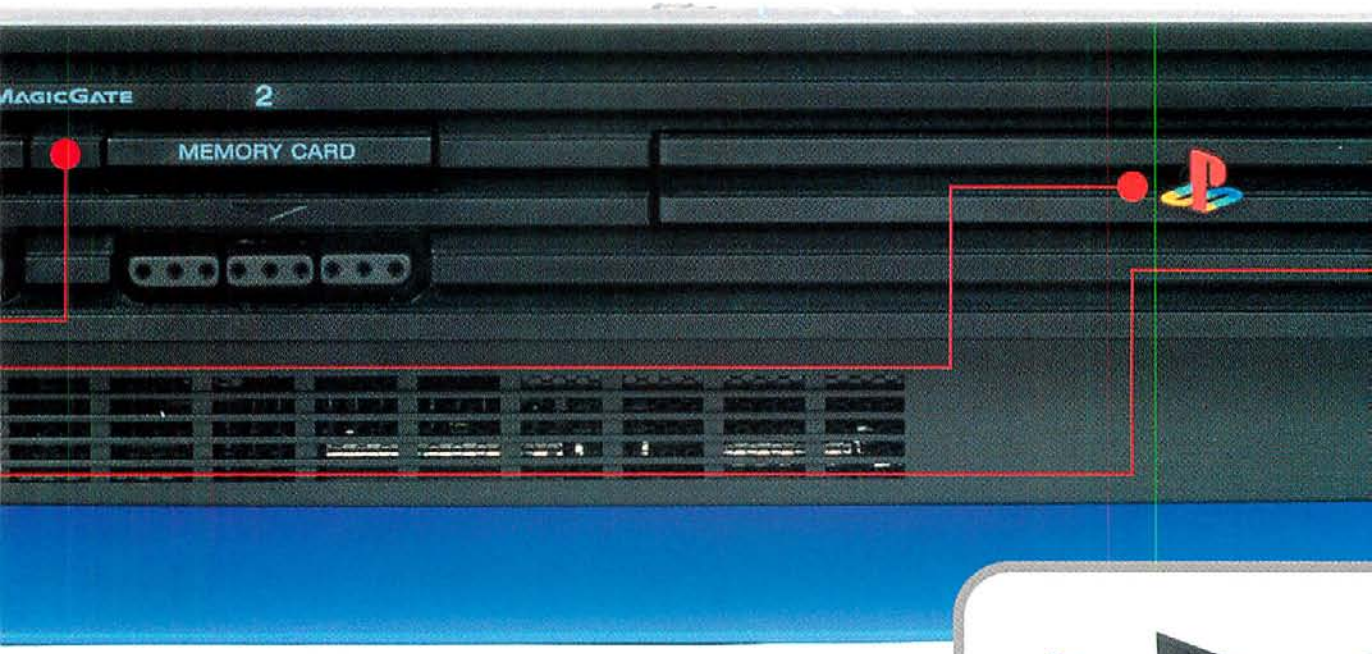
SYSTEM CONFIGURATION

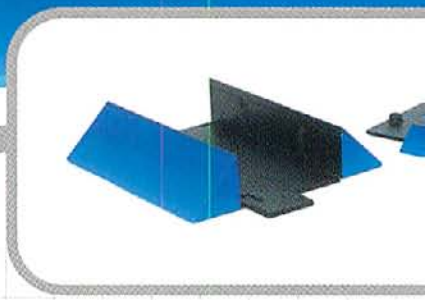
Here's where you can customize your system's settings: change the language for the menus to Japanese or English, the time and date (yes, the PS2 has an internal clock), turn the digital audio out on or off, set the component video out to RGB or Y Cb/Pb Cr/Pr, and finally adjust the screen ratio to full screen or the letterboxed 4:3 or 16:9 ratios.

VERSION

These are the programs that run various functions inside your PS2, and will surely be upgradeable in the future. The list on the system as it stands now is browser, CD player, PlayStation driver and DVD driver, all of which are version 1.00 (not surprising since this is from one of the first PS2s off the production line!). You can't really do much here yet, except for one very important, very cool setting under the PlayStation driver, where you can adjust the PS2 to play your PS1 games with faster loading and smoother textures.

[PS2 SHOWN ACTUAL SIZE]





port, also known by the much more friendly name "Firewire." This same digital an be found on camcorders, cameras and iMac computers, and will give the ly fast connection to those kinds of peripherals in the future.

Trip Hawkins, CEO of 3DO, on the PS2 to NEWSWEEK

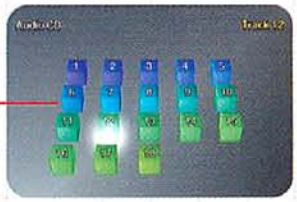
the same way the printing press did."

STEM



BOOTY CALL

On bootup, four colored lights (purple, red, blue, and green) swirl around a dark blue mist, with any number of transparent cubes scattered about—the number of cubes seems to increase the more you play your PS2. After a couple of seconds and a loud tone, the "camera" zooms into the mist, and your disc loads. Huzzah!



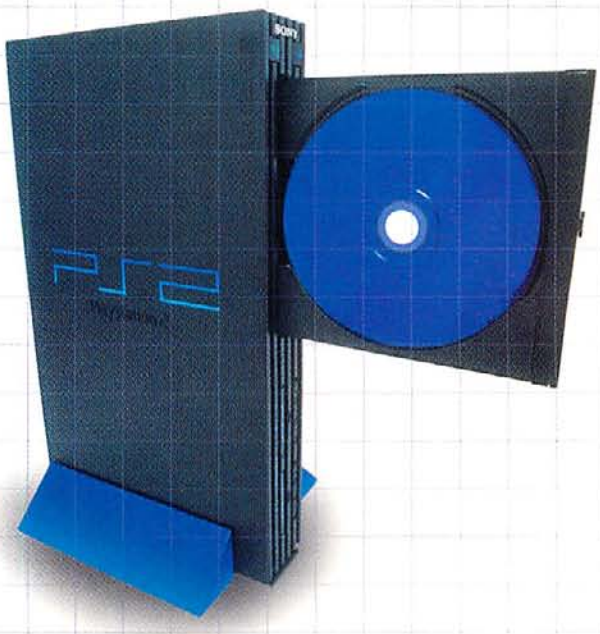




Here we have a pic of the PS2's CD player interface (top)—unfortunately even more boring than the PS1's. Next is a shot of a system settings screen (middle), which keeps up the "clear crystal and swirling lights" motif of all the system menus. And finally we see what the browser looks like (bottom), with a memory card, PocketStation and DVD in the PS2, all represented by icons.



Two different stands went on sale along with the PS2 in Japan, a horizontal and a vertical stand. The horizontal stand (about $9) lays under the PS2 and really doesn't do much except look nice, while the vertical stand (about $14) stabilizes the PS2 so it can stand on one end and save space.



THE DVD MOVIES

Unlike the Japanese PlayStation2, which requires a memory card file to play DVD movies, the U.S. version allows you to watch your favorite flicks right out of the box. If you've yet to watch a movie on DVD, you'll immediately see the giant increase in visual quality that it offers. And don't forget all those nifty extras such as trailers, behind the scenes footage and director's commentary, that can be found on many DVD releases.


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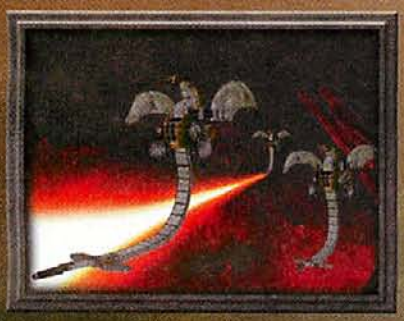
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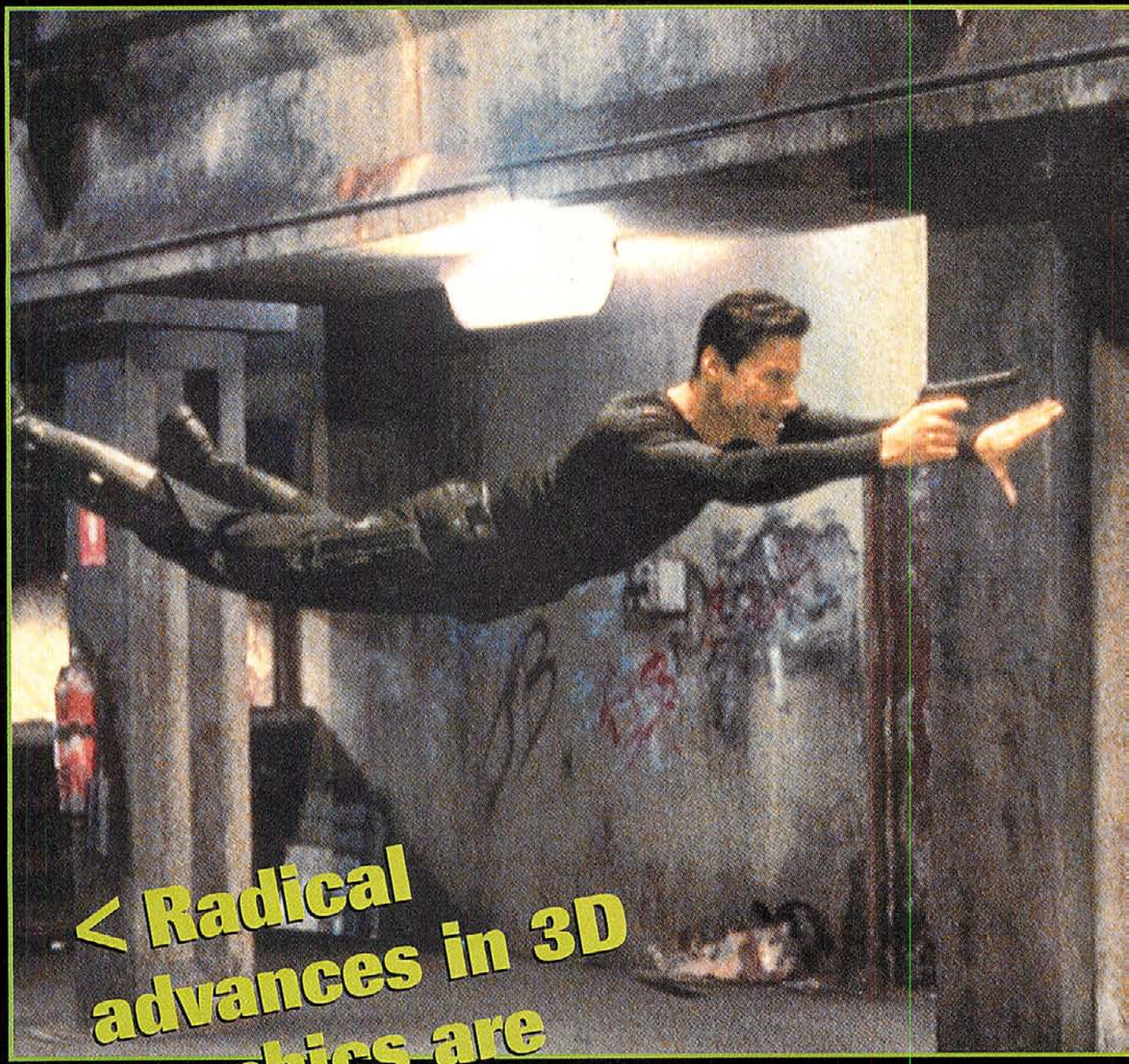
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<GAMES...WILL...L



< Radical advances in 3D graphics are going to put you into the matrix. >

by Dave Salvator

OK...LIKE...THIS>



Remember how *The Matrix* took you to another world? Its immersion was so complete, its special effects so stunning and seamless, the real world just melted away for 136 minutes. That sense of artificial reality—or the "Hollywood Experience," as game industry types put it—is one of the great driving forces in 3D graphics innovation. The goal for game designers and 3D hardware architects is to deliver special effects that rival anything you've seen in a big-budget movie. PC gamers are going to have front row seats to an amazing new era in graphics realism.

In the next few years, you're going to see phenomenal advances in lighting, more life-like scenes populated with more inhabitants, and far more detailed-looking characters. Virtual actors will begin to take on human qualities, both in terms of their behavior and expressions. Imagine these actors not only conversing with you but also having emotive facial responses that make their personas as three-dimensional as their bodies. How soon will we see these changes? Five years, you think? Some game designers have already begun using facial-capture technology, and they say we're going to see *The Matrix*-quality special effects on PCs in two to three years. And you wondered what people were going to do with 2GHz systems....

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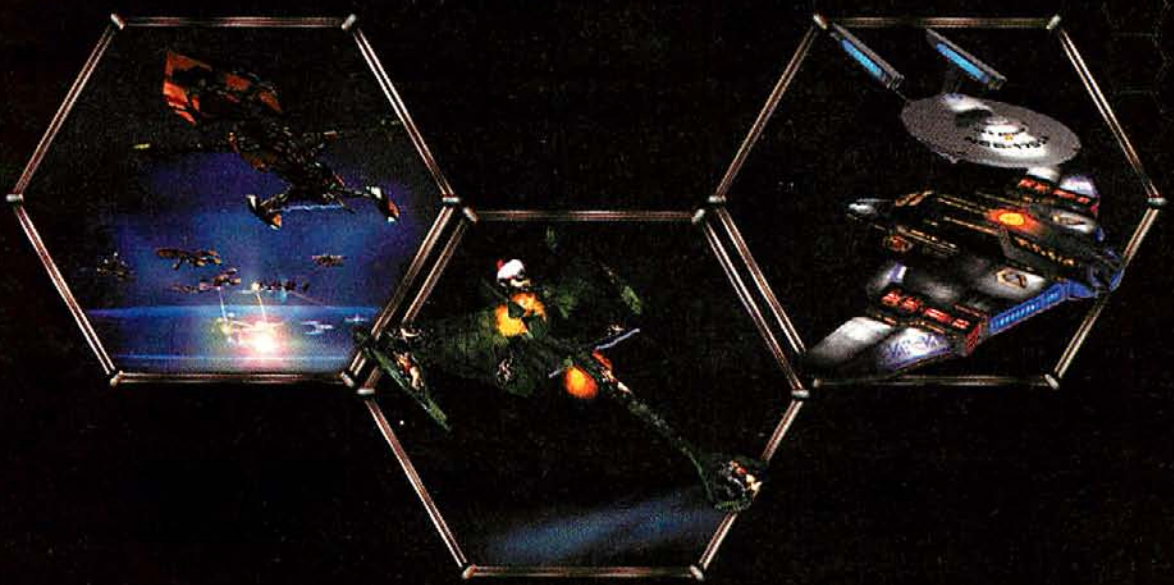
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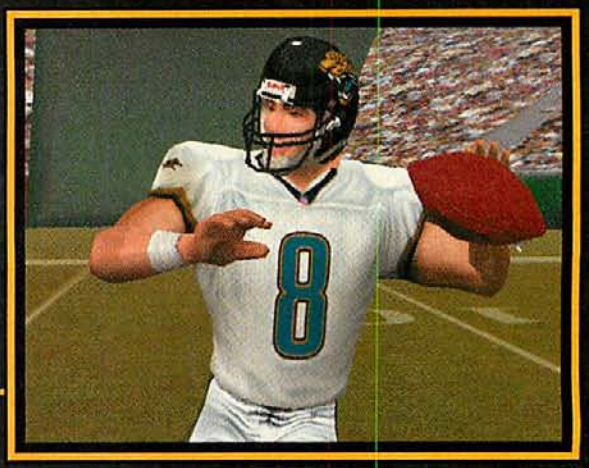
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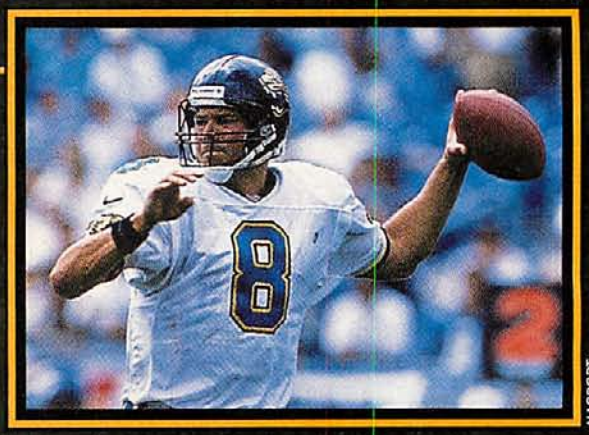
NUMBING SPEED

It's amazing how far we've come in such a short period of time. I joined *CGW* at the dawn of the 3D revolution, and I remember early conversations with Rendition and 3dfx about their first-generation parts. These were two hungry upstarts who were trying to set the industry on fire with technology the gaming public didn't even comprehend. But I remember seeing VQUAKE—a version of QUAKE designed to use Rendition's V1000 chip—running at the then-amazing resolution of 640x480, and knew that the shape of things to come was triangles, and lots of them.

Since then, the rate of innovation of 3D chips has been such that nVidia's rallying cry is, "Moore's Law is for wimps!", referring to the former Intel chief's tenet that PC processing power doubles about every 18 months. The pace of increase in 3D graphics chip processing power has far outstripped that rate, at times approaching 8X leaps in horsepower in a single year. Through several generations of chips, we've come to not only acclimate to this rate of change, but expect it.

But that's ancient history now. This is the computer gaming industry we're talking about, and who gives a rip about the past? It's all about the future. And what does 3D's future look like?





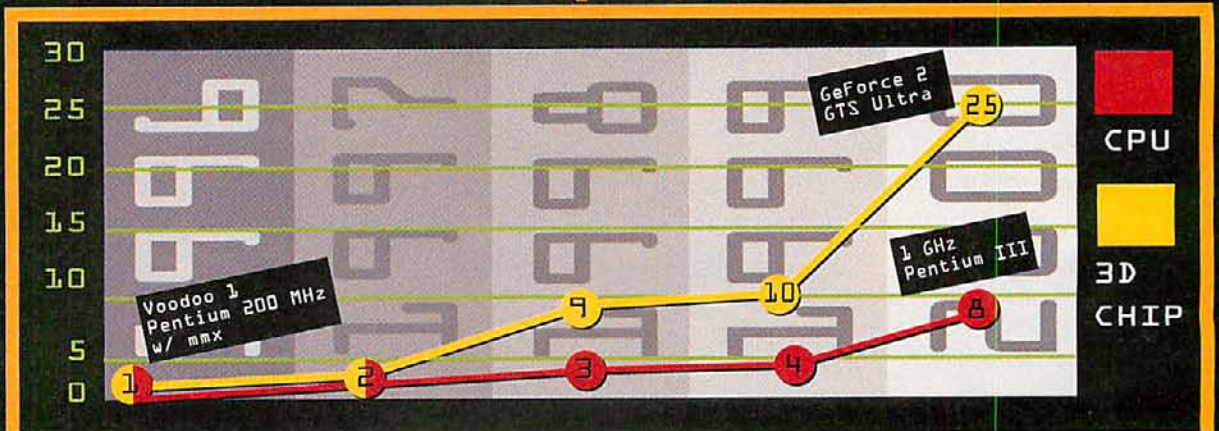
ALLSPORT

GOAL TO GO Polygonal players in MADDEN 2001 are smoother than ever, but they still don't compare to the real thing. Advances in lighting and higher triangle counts will soon allow realistic players' faces, dirt, flying mud, blood, and appropriately pudgy linemen.

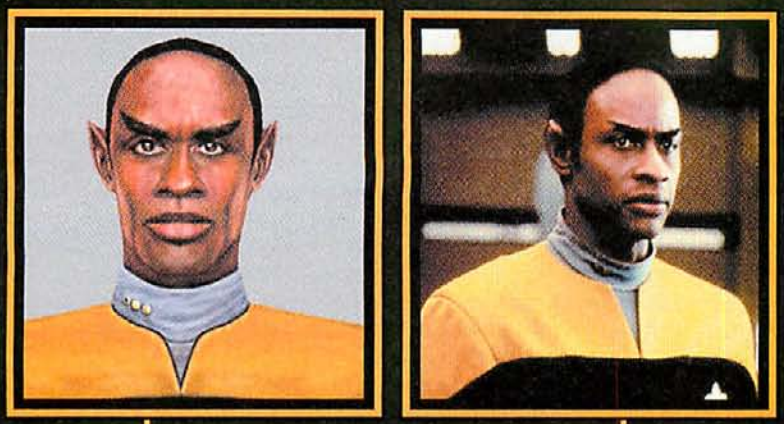
LIGHTS, TRIANGLES, ACTION!

The possibilities are as boundless as the imaginations of the designers who create these otherworlds. Many developers are striving to deliver nothing short of the same visual magic that wows movie audiences. Epic Games' Tim Sweeney, the engine architect behind UNREAL TOURNAMENT, believes that "photo-realism is a good goal, but you have to look at photo-realism in the way that moviemakers do: We aim for visually realistic scenes, but we want everything

Moore's Law Is for Wimps!



Moore's Law states that CPUs double in power about every 18 months. As this chart shows, the rate of performance increase of 3D graphics chips has been roughly triple that of CPUs. 3D chips are now about 25 times faster than they were in 1996. And, with the arrival of 1.5GHz Pentium IV and Athlon CPUs, and the next-generation technology in the works from chipmakers, this ride is far from over.



HAVE WE MET? STAR TREK ELITE FORCE shows how games are bringing more and more facial and body detail to models. In the coming years you'll see wrinkles in clothes, realistic-looking speech, and hair that actually moves.

to be a lot more vibrant and exciting than real life." Legendary game designer Peter Molyneux sees things in a different light: "Games do need to look like movies, but not to be limited by the factors that limit what movies can do." And what's needed to bring that cinematic look to games?

One of the biggest improvements you'll see in the next year or so will be in lighting. You might not think that lighting is important, but as any cinematographer will tell you, lighting is everything—it sets the mood, through a combination of what it illuminates, and what it doesn't. Think how the movie *Aliens* would've looked without those eerie shadows and steam.

We have lighting effects in current games, but they're often hacks, or simulated lights that can't react in realtime. A common technique has been to use light maps, which are bright textures painted on top of other textures in a scene. And while some games have had shadow effects, there remains much progress to be made on the way to dynamic lighting like that in *Aliens*.

> Games do need to look like movies, but not to be limited by the factors that limit what movies can do.
>
> Peter Molyneux, Lionhead Studios

SAY GOODBYE, BLOCKHEAD

What may be more noticeable to gamers will be higher-definition characters and scenery. Over the next several years, the number of polygons (triangles) that developers can use in each scene will grow enormously. More triangles equate to more complex, better-defined scenes, particularly when it comes to models of people and animals. Recall the square-necked models from the original QUAKE versus the more fluid models of UNREAL TOURNAMENT to visualize the progress already made. Tony Lupidi, an Art Director at EA working on THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH (TWINE), looks for-

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GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS

MATURE M

ESRB

ward to having "art and animation of the same high production values as seen in the very best movies and animated films."

Realism involves more than detailed characters. Lupidi observes that "game worlds are just too spare and empty of the multitudes of stuff you live with in your everyday environment. Open your closet or look at your desk to see what I mean." The technologies associated with accelerated transform and lighting (T&L) will enable developers to portray complicated scenes, replete with the clutter of our everyday life.

Higher triangle counts also means more models on the screen. Think about the 3D worlds you've encountered in your gaming adventures—how many moving characters were on-screen at a given time? Maybe five or ten? The simpler answer would be not enough. Think about a football game—22 players on the field and another 60 on the sidelines. Picture your running back getting knocked out of bounds, careening through those players, and crashing headlong into the Gatorade table. Or picture the opening scene in *Saving Private Ryan*. Imagine storming the beach with thousands of soldiers, picking your way among the obstacles to take out the enemy's defenses. Even wargamers are going to reap big benefits from these advances.

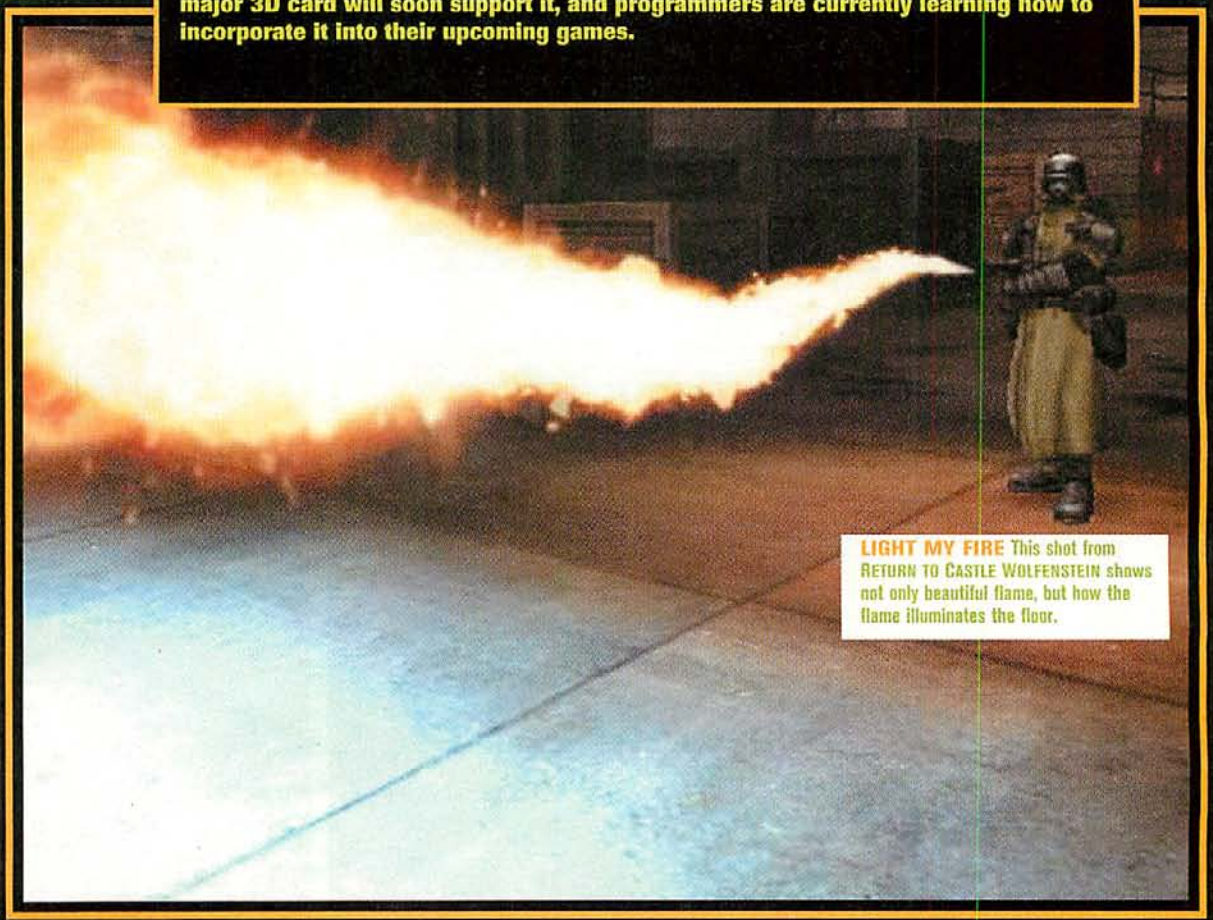
An added bonus of T&L is the ability to do more elaborate particle systems. Peter Molyneux notes, "The problem with computer environments is that they don't look dirty enough. In real life everything has dirt, but computer environments are always too pristine to be real."

SURFACE TENSION

It's not easy painting smooth surfaces out of triangular shapes, but that's the problem every 3D artist faces. Tim Sweeney notes that "we are still incapable

What Is Transform and Lighting?

T&L refers to two successive stages of rendering a scene on a 3D card. Transforming triangles means moving them from one location to another in a given scene, essentially calculating motion. Lighting refers to "geometric" lights, or dynamic lighting that changes in realtime, based on intensity and objects in its path. Right now, most games can't convey what it looks like to walk down a street at night. Geometric lights—made possible by T&L—will throw realistic shadows that react to your motion. Nvidia introduced accelerated T&L with GeForce, but every major 3D card will soon support it, and programmers are currently learning how to incorporate it into their upcoming games.



LIGHT MY FIRE This shot from RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN shows not only beautiful flame, but how the flame illuminates the floor.



MESS O' CRITTERS The greater scene detail afforded by accelerated T&L will make possible densely-populated scenes, like this one in SACRIFICE.

of rendering realistic materials. We need very accurate surface-lighting models, representing all of the possibilities for lighting. In the past, we simply didn't have any tools with which to solve these problems, but now with the Microsoft/NVidia/3dfx/ATI push for DirectX8 'pixel shaders,' we can start attacking these problems. Major visible progress will occur within a year, but we're still four to six years away from having enough pixel precision...and 3D graphics power."

The "pixel shaders" that Sweeney refers to are a key component of DirectX 8. These programmable shaders will allow developers to have much more flexibility in defining their lights, and will allow more highly detailed surfaces that appear to have texture. Blizzard's Jay Patel is equally enthused about this new flexibility in Direct3D, but he cautions that "it will take some time before developers get their brains around the new features and programmability of DirectX 8."

So this trio of features—lighting, higher triangle counts, and surfaces—will do a great deal to bring a more realistic look to the 3D worlds we play in. But there's an added benefit: Programmable shaders and accelerated T&L will both be done on the 3D card, freeing a considerable amount of CPU power for other things. Rather than having the game's 3D engine consuming the lion's share of the CPU (even with a 3D card installed), developers can instead make big improvements in physics modeling, character AI, and collision detection—just to name a few often-neglected gameplay elements.

BETTER 3D GRAPHICS. BETTER GAMES?

Will 3D graphics make gameplay more engaging? Developers had mixed answers to this question. EA's Tony Lupidi believes that "as overall scene density increases, we will be able to create a more immersive environment with more emotional/believable characters that inhabit it." But Epic's Tim Sweeney emphasizes, "Graphics don't make games more fun! Fun games existed long before good graphics. The best that graphics can hope to do is to make games more realistic, and therefore more immersive. They can draw the player in more effectively, but ultimately, it's the pure gameplay that keeps players coming back for more."

But in the hands of masterful designers like Miyamoto or Molyneux or Meier, gaming experiences could prove to be more powerful than motion pictures. It's one thing to watch Neo as he jacks into *The Matrix*. It will be quite another when you're doing it yourself in virtual Technicolor. The budgets for these games could grow five-fold, because outrageous special effects aren't cheaper just because they're shown on 17-inch monitors. But for those companies that can afford the utmost in visual fidelity, and for those who can afford the latest hardware, it will be only a few years before we step into virtual worlds as realistic as the one outside. CGW

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Building the 3D

How silicon sculptors 3dfx and nVidia see tomorrow's 3D graphics

While game developers give life to the games we play and love, it's the hardware architects who build the underlying playground that makes it all possible. To get a sense of where things are headed with future hardware, we sat down with two of the industry's leading architects, 3dfx's Scott Sellers and nVidia's David Kirk. And despite the sometimes-vitriolic tone of online debates between each company's adherents, the meeting was civil, and the two architects wound up agreeing with one another more often than not.



Both architects see the future of 3D as being cinematically driven. Scott Sellers explains, "As great as 3D graphics are now and how far they've come, if you show the latest/greatest game running on the latest/greatest hardware to someone who's not familiar with computer-generated graphics, it's still very underwhelming. Their mindset is still absolutely being set by Hollywood....[and] we are still enormously far away from being able to offer a Hollywood experience in realtime." But David Kirk observes that, "...cinematic realism comes from the ability to do more realistic shading and lighting. Those capabilities are beginning to exist in the hardware now, and the game authors are just beginning to explore those features and experiment with them, and we're starting to see some really stunning effects." And although the two perhaps disagree as to how soon we'll be seeing photo-realistic cinematic effects in games, they do agree that DirectX 8's new programmable pipeline is going to enable developers to create never-before-seen effects in new games. As hardware developers, their task is to build a playground for both developers and gamers to romp on, and then turn them loose. Sellers notes that, "all you can do is give them the tools, and they're going to be able to generate things we couldn't even imagine."

<All you can do is give game developers the tools, and they're going to generate things we couldn't even imagine.>

Scott Sellers, 3dfx

But several considerable challenges stand in the way of the continued (r)evolution. The biggest one, both agree, is video memory bandwidth. Sellers states, "memory bandwidth is the number-one challenge that the industry faces, and it has been for quite some time. We are certainly not being limited by pixel-generation capabilities." As these 3D engines' horsepower has grown at their outrageous clip, memory technology's rate of advancement hasn't kept pace. There are faster DDR SDRAM memories coming into the market by the month, but these 3D engines, which use a "brute force" approach to high performance—parallel pipelines, multiple textures per pixel—absolutely hammer video memory.



<Our motto has always been 'Why use a screwdriver when you can use a sledgehammer?'>

David Kirk, nVidia

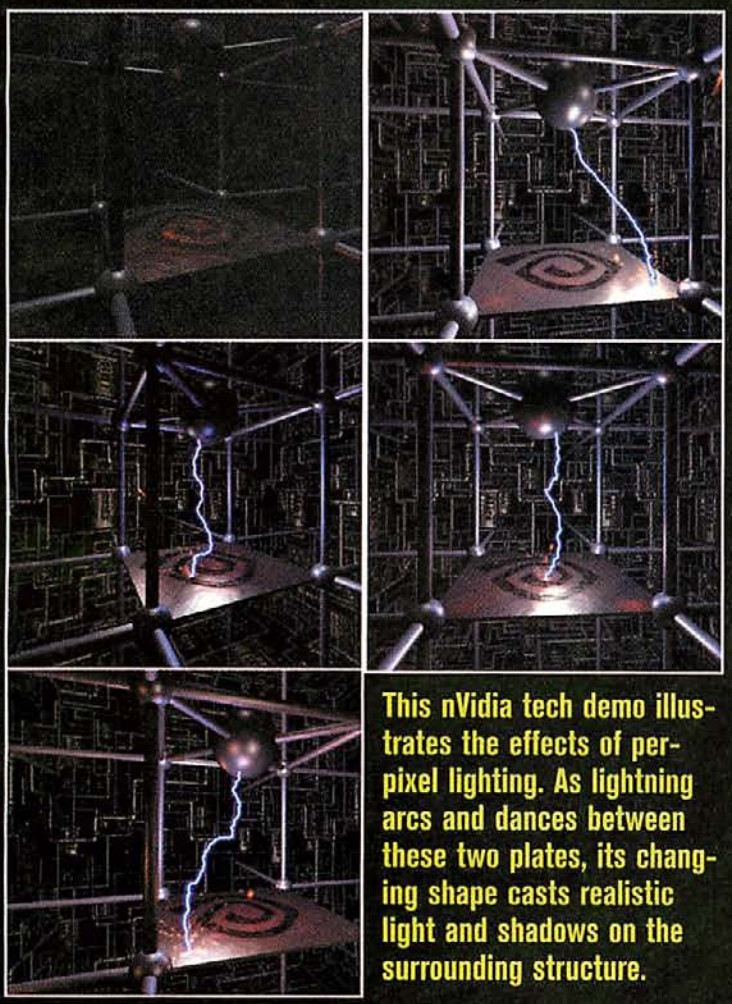
Playground

Kirk wryly notes that "our motto as far as brute force goes has always been 'Why use a screwdriver when you can use a sledgehammer instead?' " But he goes on to say, "Products coming out this fall and next year have the ability...to draw way too many pixels." And this is where both architects believe that DirectX's new programmability is going to play a key role. Kirk explains that "one of the motivations for exploring per-pixel shading, and the ability to do complex and interesting pixel-shading programs, is to try and shift the battle from more pixels to better pixels."

On the topic of the "Xbox effect" on the PC gaming industry, both architects see more upside than down. nVidia got the design win to do Xbox's graphics system, and many of the strides made in developing this new graphics chipset will likely migrate to the PC after Xbox's introduction. Sellers sees a kind of cross-pollination effect happening due to the platforms' similar architectures: "Xbox is a good thing for the industry in general, because it will get developers working on DirectX 8 features sooner."

As for "far out" technologies, things like holographic displays or major advances in 3D glasses, both were rather skeptical. Kirk observes that "there have been a lot of attempts to make holographic displays, and they're all terrible." But he points to a coming display technology somewhat similar to current LCD flat-panel technologies that will be capable of resolutions like 6000x4000, which would make for a very big picture indeed. CGW

Let There Be Light



This nVidia tech demo illustrates the effects of per-pixel lighting. As lightning arcs and dances between these two plates, its changing shape casts realistic light and shadows on the surrounding structure.

Sharp Shooting

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It is I, RAGNAR the mighty
wielder of battle-AXE,
SHIVER of sword, and MANIFester
of MAGIC.
It has been WANT of light
AND DECADENCE RAGING
SINCE I last FARED thee WELL.
THE VIKING LANDS have been
ripped open like A SCAB!
THE MARROW FLOWING,
DARK SHADOWS EXCOMMUNICATED
FROM the NetherWORLD
by the
BESTIAL SARK AMEN.

WHEN FIRST I BORE ON AND SAW
the pillage AND LOOTING
by those bound in EVIL,
I, RAGNAR the MIGHTY,
hit my KNEES IN
the MOST VIOLENT of retches
after surveying the SIGHTS of
three-day spoils left
lying stretched AND MAIMED
in the FIELD of BATTLE.

AS I EMERGED,
UNHURT AND UNSCATHED
FROM the UNDERWORLD
I FOUND, IT WAS HE,
CONRACK the CONQUEROR,
WHO SCAPEGOATED
the BLAME AND BANE OF SARK AMEN'S
ATTACKS.


"Its melee-intensive combat and absolutely evil visuals should put it a 'cut' above the rest" - IGN
"Prepare to be knocked flat on your ass by Rune from HumanHead Studios" - Incite
His city, torn and MANGLED, it was here I MET and Lopped the HEAD of my First DARK WARRIOR and LEARNED that my VILLAGE and PEOPLE were to be the next SpoILS of SARKAMEN'S WAR.
IT IS HERE MY QUEST took FORM.
MATURE (17+)
MILD ANIMATED VIOLENCE
MATURE
M
AGES 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
PUBLISHED BY
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HOW DO WE RATE?

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches.



Outstanding The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.



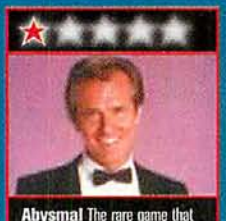
Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.



Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.



Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.



Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

Hey, Where's Regis?

Regis isn't a pure game show host. He's a talk/game show "personality," and does not fit into this group of more traditional (some might say "classic") game show icons. You can read all about it in my manifesto, *Regis Philbin, AntiChrist Superstar.* - Tom Price

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: HEAVY METAL FAKK 2

HEAVY METAL looks hot, but it's not a satisfying play

A Quick FAKK



The new animated sequel to the 1981 cult classic *Heavy Metal 2000* was originally conceived as an homage to former Penthouse Pet Julie Strain. HEAVY METAL FAKK 2 – the PC game based on the new movie – succeeds brilliantly in fulfilling that vision. It's a perfect reflection of a silicone skin queen: beautiful, artificial, shallow, and unfulfilling.

It's not as if the game's designers lack talent or expertise. They deftly combine several popular gaming styles into a balanced blend of action and adventure. It plays in third-person, using both first-person shooter and fighting-game elements in combat, and includes a fair amount of dialogue and scripted events to advance the story. The problem is that there are too few original or interesting challenges. The combat becomes repetitive, the jumping sequences are tedious, and the controls are often unresponsive. Playing the game can be rewarding at times and visually arresting, but it can also be

ACTION

reviewed by Ken Brown



DIE BY THE SWORD These Gith recruiters are a combination of televangelist and corporate trainer, and they unleash wicked critters from their midst.

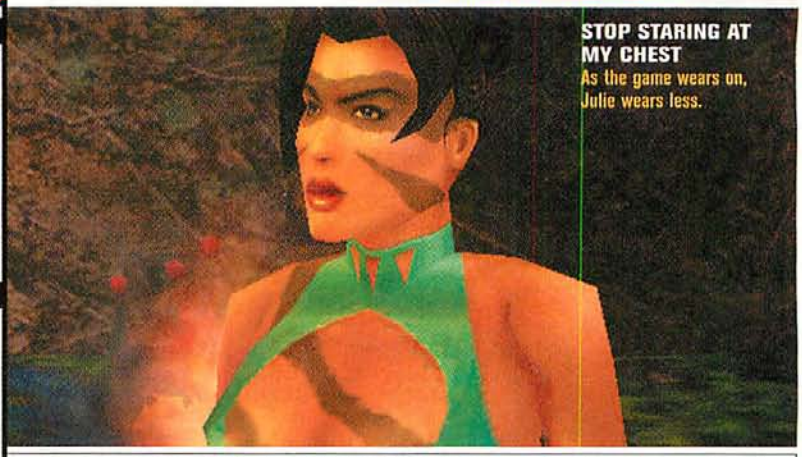
CGW RATED

PROS

Gorgeous graphics; fluid animation; cool weapons; two-fisted combat; good blend of action and adventure.

CONS

No relationship to the classic *Heavy Metal* movie or comic books; weak story; tedious jumping puzzles; repetitive, uninspired game design.



STOP STARING AT MY CHEST As the game wears on, Julie wears less.

Requirements: Pentium-II 300 or Celeron 300A, 64MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space, Open GL-compatible video card with 8MB memory. **Recommended Requirements:** P-II/Athlon/Celeron 400, 128MB RAM, 240MB hard drive space, Nvidia GeForce or TNT2, ATI Rage 128 or 3dfx Voodoo 5 video card. **3D Support:** Open GL **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • Developer: Ritual Entertainment • $40 • www.ritual.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.



UH OH Giant spacecraft hovering overhead are never a good sign. Surpisingly, the assault never really looks like a full-scale invasion.

frustrating, pointless, or monotonous.

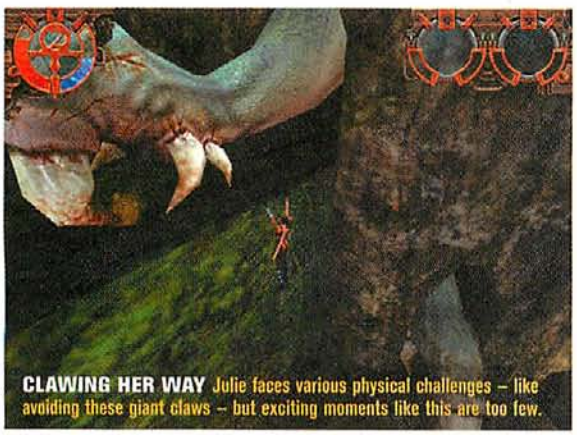
If you didn't see the original movie or its sequel, and you aren't familiar with the *Heavy Metal* comic books, don't worry. This game has no relationship to the original movie, and other than having a few wall panels with artwork from Simon Bisley on them, there's no connection to the classic HM universe. The game picks up 30 years after the end of the new movie, a film which impressed Hollywood so little that they decided not to show it in theaters. Fortunately, the game isn't *that* bad.

East of Eden

Our heroine, Julie, lives with her companions on an idyllic world called Eden. Eden is a gorgeous place with magical waters that keeps the population from aging (just go along with it for now). It's the kind of place that needs protecting, so the inhabitants have constructed an orbiting energy shield. When the shield goes down, Julie emerges as the sole inhabitant who can fight off swarms of malevolent creatures and get the shield working again (keep going along with it for now). But she has to do it quickly, because an invasion appears imminent.

Julie learns all this by wandering around the city and enduring some truly inane dialogue from the townspeople. Fortunately, she picked up some good weapons and skills in a tutorial-training center that morning, so she's well prepared to deal with the growing threat of nasties that have begun to plague the city. When the invasion begins, the game gets more interesting as Julie starts hacking hordes of smiling munchkins, cyborg sentinels packing heat and spewing flame, and this year's most popular filler monsters – killer mosquitos.

Eventually, you'll enter a showdown with a boss monster that's fairly easy to kill, and that essentially concludes act one of a three-act play. Next, it's off to the swamps to search for something called the Heart of the We, a spirit force that can uncork a jug of whup-ass on the invaders. The swamps are appropriately murky and creepy, but the gameplay there consists almost entirely of jumping puzzles. There's no character interaction, nothing to move the story along, and lots of



CLAWING HER WAY Julie faces various physical challenges – like avoiding these giant claws – but exciting moments like this are too few.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Once you've figured out the rings, wings, and things, the system works pretty well, although you may well long for the less abstract interface of Jennifer Lopez."—*Jason Kapalka, reviewing* REACH FOR THE STARS

Don't Cry for Me

By Tom Price

We're knee-deep in mediocrity this month. One look at the (mostly) low ratings we handed out attests to the fact that we're wading in the murky shallows of this year's gaming pool. But don't worry, I'm not about to tell you how put out the game reviewers at *CGW* are about having to play these weak titles, or how it's times like these that our jobs suck. You know why? Because our jobs don't suck! We're the luckiest bastards in the world!

How many times have you clenched your teeth in anger at some spoiled rotten game "journalist" who writes about how much life sucks because they just had to play all the way through DAIKATANA and write a review on it? You won't hear us complaining. How dare we anyway? Our readers plop down good money for games (hopefully on our recommendation) and have little sympathy for someone who "has to" play games for a living. We're in this business for three reasons:

1. The Games: So what if I've still got copies of BEATDOWN stinking up my shelves; the free (FREE) copies of every game that's come out this year more than makes up for it.

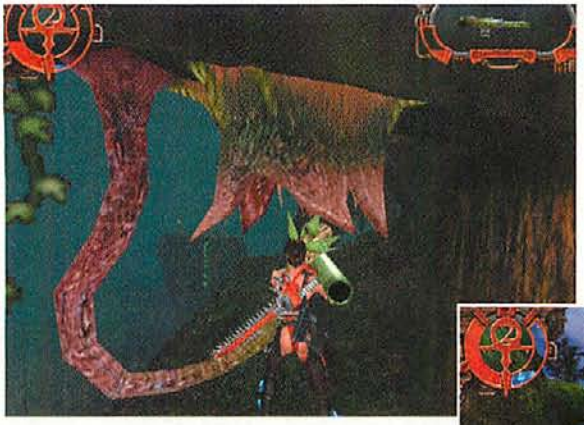
2. The Money: It's not great, but it's a living. Hell, I'd make more as a school teacher, but not having to listen to whiny little runny-nosed brats all day (Jeff Green excluded) is worth more than money.

3. The Tchotchkes: I don't know how I lived before I had all these Nerf guns. And of course, some day, my grandkids will be taking their inheritance (i.e., the Sammy Sosa bobble-head figurine) to the Antiques Roadshow.

In a perfect world, every whiny, pimply-faced game reviewer complaining about the unfairness of his job would be handed a shovel and directed to the nearest ditch. Don't let them fool you; this job is never hard, and those of us lucky enough to do it should be thanking the gaming gods every minute of the day for smiling down upon us. In fact, I've got to go sacrifice an editorial assistant to them right now.

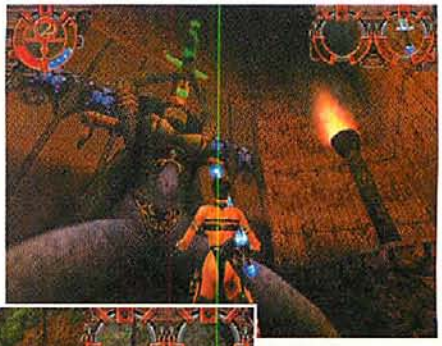
NOVEMBER REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Age of Empires 2: The Conquerors	★★★★★
Bang! Gunship Elite	★★★★★
Cleopatra	★★★★★
Dogs of War	★★★★★
Grand Prix 3	★★★★★
Metal Fatigue	★★★★★
Reach for the Stars	★★★★★
Sanity	★★★★★
The Sims: Livin' Large	★★★★½
SoulBringer	★★★★★
Submarine Titans	★★★★★
Sydney Olympics 2000	★★★★★



FACEPLANT Our heroine meets her demise again, this time in the iron grip of a carnivorous plant.

STOP STARING AT HER CHEST You'll encounter plenty of oversized monuments to the female form. They're big, but they don't feel right.





STONEFACED HEAVY METAL offers a nice sense of adventure, but the objectives are often little more than finding a stone to pay homage to a tiki sculpture.

ways to die. But there are some interesting challenges in avoiding giant claw-like cave-dwellers, dive-bombing birds, and various carnivorous plants.

Mercifully, there are fewer jumping puzzles in the final third of the game, and combat becomes more intense. You'll face tougher critters, more varied challenges, and some spectacular environments, but by this time there's hardly any story left, and the game has descended into "find the four keys to unlock the four spirits of restorative goodness." This is one of the game's main weaknesses – that it rarely rises above rehashed, nonsensical objectives that have no relationship to *Heavy Metal*, no meaning to the story, and nothing to keep your interest other than a general desire to finish a game you paid 40 bucks for. It's not what you'd call a taut, suspenseful adventure.



IN HEAT The Soul Harvester is one of the most vicious enemies, with a whirling-dervish attack that will tear you apart. Julie's flaming weapons help keep the heat on him.

Fight, Die, Reload

Combat is one of the game's strong points, but it's not as good as it should be. Julie encounters new weapons throughout the game, both melee and ranged, and the variety makes QUAKE III look like scissors/paper/rock. There's a flaming sword, giant axe, flamethrower, rocket launcher, twin Uzis, soul-sucker, and chaingun, just to name a few. Most of these have alternate-fire capabilities, and the designers did a great job of making sure each weapon is useful. The most striking innovation, though, is that Julie can use a weapon in one hand and block with a shield in the other. It's not always effective to do so, but there are times when it works well. In addition, Julie can use fighting game-style combo moves that increase attack damage. At its flesh-hacking, bullet-spewing best, combat can be a real kick in the ass.

At its worst, it can be a mouse-slamming, concussive-cussing aggravation. It takes only about 10 mutant mosquitos to make you wish you'd never bought the game. A lack of ammo in the earlier levels forces you to rely on melee attacks, making you more vulnerable to the accursed cycle of die, reload, repeat. The monsters aren't varied enough throughout the game, and boss-level creatures in one level can turn into common enemies later. If you complete a level with low health, you might have to go back to the previous level to do it again better, or you'll be too weak to face the next challenge.



HIYAAAA!!! Lord Tyler provides a formidable opponent, until Julie decides to turn his own weapons against him.

The final showdown with Lord Tyler brings out some of the best and worst aspects of the game. Tyler is a fantastic, towering malevolence with hit points for years. Julie must use all her wiles to nail him with the right kinds of weapons, eluding both him and his minions, to keep him off-balance. You'll die perhaps 50-100 times. In the midst of it all, darting endlessly around obstacles to avoid him, you'll get stuck in the landscape and become so aggravated you could strangle Julie yourself. But eventually Tyler falls with a great thud, and you'll feel like you've actually accomplished something.

And Like That, It Was Over

There's an old Jewish joke with two women complaining about the food in heaven. The first one says, "The food here is terrible," and the second one adds, "Yeah, and the portions are so small." HEAVY METAL isn't a terrible game, but it would be remembered as a better game if it offered a longer, more fulfilling challenge. Some players have reported finishing it in under 10 hours, and although it took me about twice that long, it's still short.

I wish I had better things to say about the game, because I really wanted to like it. It's amazing to see what Ritual did with the QUAKE III engine, and the artwork is consistently excellent. I didn't have any problems with stability, but others have not been so lucky. I simply found that the game offered too little depth and creativity to deliver a satisfying ride. CGW

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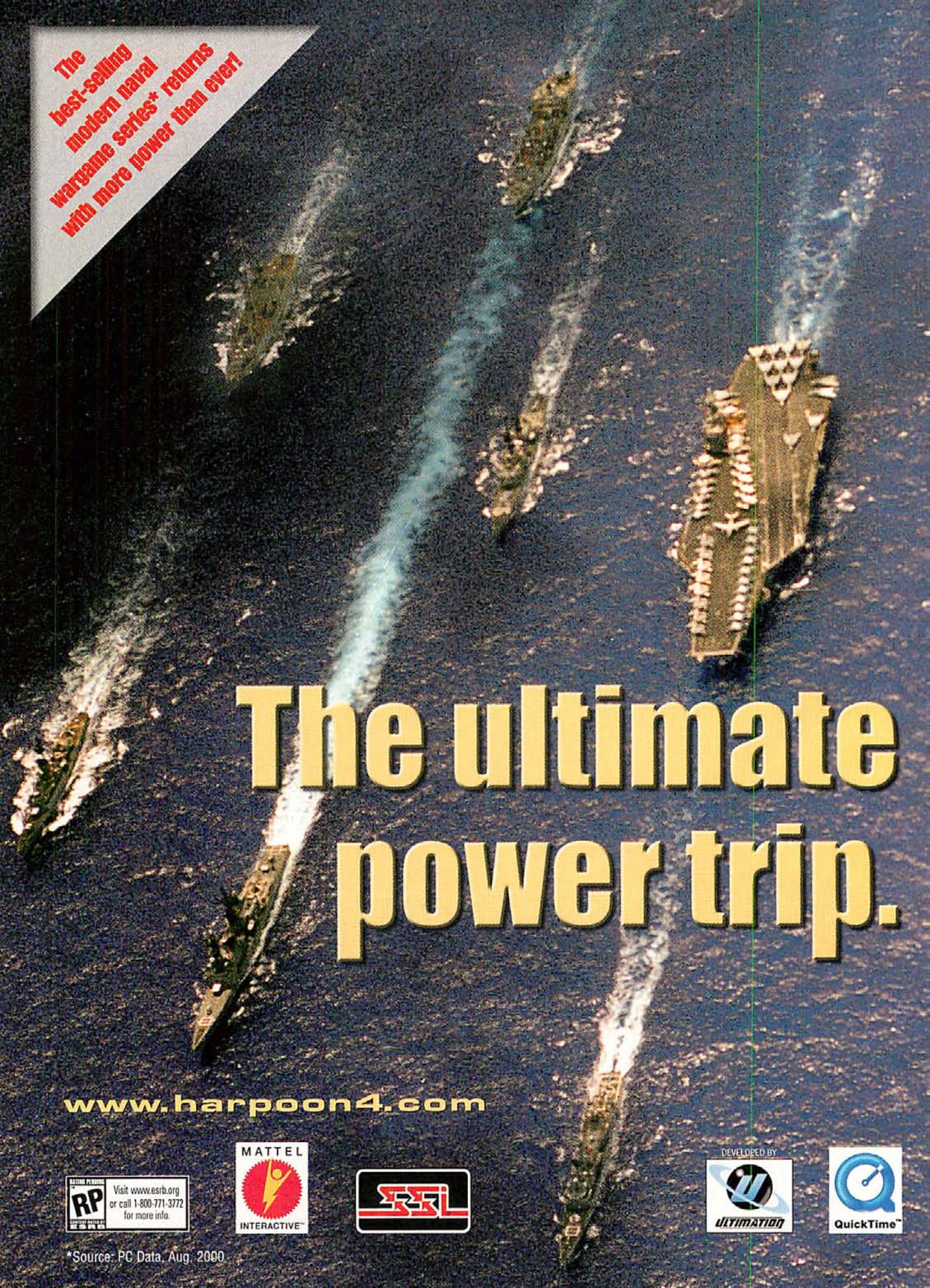
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM

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ULTIMATION
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*Source: PC Data, Aug. 2000

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WINDOWS® 95/98 CD-ROM

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LIVIN' LARGE. Bizarre as a head in a jar.

The Surreal World



THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE

reviewed by "R. Kincaid"

THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE. Will it improve your life? And more importantly, will it improve the lives of your Sims? Today on Maury, *we ask the newest citizens of Simsville their opinions. What they say may surprise or even shock you.*

Lovey Hartley: I thought it would be fun, like *The Real World.* Instead, it was a nightmare.

Michaelfish Vanilla: The death. The disease. The torture. That hideous goddamn clown. It was a living hell.

Jimmy Layabout: For me, it couldn't have been sweeter.

Let's get a few things clear first. You all lived in one of the new subdivisions, correct?

Michaelfish: That's right, Maury. There are now five neighborhoods providing fifty lots for families.

Jimmy: And the houses are way cooler than the old ones.

Lovey: That's easy for you to say. I started out in a feeder house, created solely to befriend you and other Sims. I enjoyed none of the new floors, walls, or nifty new items. It was a sterile, horrible existence, eight of us crammed into a garish one-room home. What kind of life is that? Thank God, I had my career.

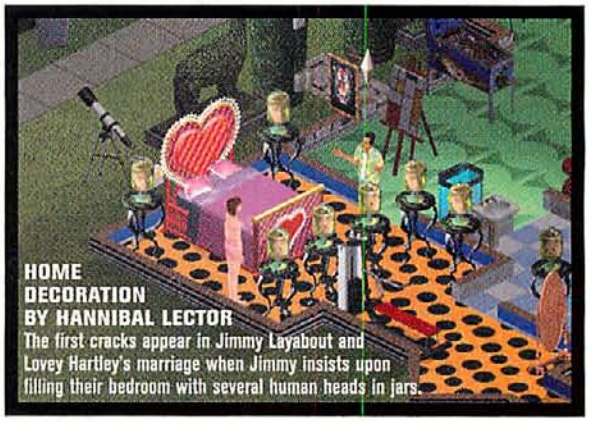
Michaelfish: Career? You're a friggin' exorcist!

Lovey: Better that than a bottom-feeding game reviewer like you. At least I got past the second rung in my paranormal career, unlike you in your abortive attempt at journalism.

Jimmy, do you have anything you'd like to say?

Jimmy: Maury, I'm all about doing nothing. I could've been a hacker or a musician. Matter of fact, I even did a stint in the military early in my life. But what I really want to do in life is nothing.

Lovey: That's for damned sure, you good-for-nothing slacker.



HOME DECORATION BY HANNIBAL LECTOR
The first cracks appear in Jimmy Layabout and Lovey Hartley's marriage when Jimmy insists upon filling their bedroom with several human heads in jars.

I'm sensing some bitterness between you two.

Jimmy: She hasn't been happy since we got married. But I admit it, I'm a slacker. I've been a caddy, a record store clerk...my ultimate goal is to be a permanent celebrity-party guest.

Michaelfish: Some slacker – you're married, for the love of God.

Jimmy: Do you have any idea how hard it is to succeed at nothing? The friendship requirements are insane. I had to marry her in order to maintain–

Lovey: That's all I am to you, a tool for your half-assed career.

Michaelfish: Can we please leave "ass" out of it? I haven't been able to sit since I was abducted by aliens.

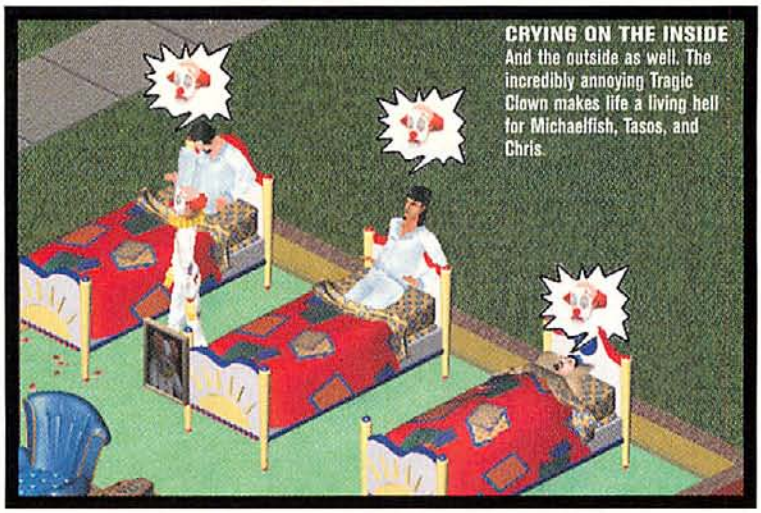
Abducted by aliens?

Michaelfish: That's right, Maury, aliens. Thanks to Lovey's constant star-gazing, she induced an alien abduction while I was visiting one night. Bright rings surrounded our bodies and we were beamed up to the mothership and....

Jimmy: Lovey's always screwing us up in some way. Like the time she rubbed that magic lantern and summoned a genie that could only come up with about $1800 in bills instead of the money she asked for. We're still paying that off.

Michaelfish: To be honest, this whole new LIVIN' LARGE world is incredibly creepy. I even saw Death, the Grim Reaper himself. Frankly, it scared me silly.

Jimmy: Maybe if you hadn't murdered your roommate...



CRYING ON THE INSIDE
And the outside as well. The incredibly annoying Tragic Clown makes life a living hell for Michaelfish, Tasos, and Chris.

CGW RATED



PROS
A slew of new possibilites and life events.

CONS
May inflict more chaos and danger upon your Sims than you'd like.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 175MB hard drive space, THE SIMS. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Maxis • $30 • www.thesims.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; mature sexual themes, mild animated violence, comic mischief.



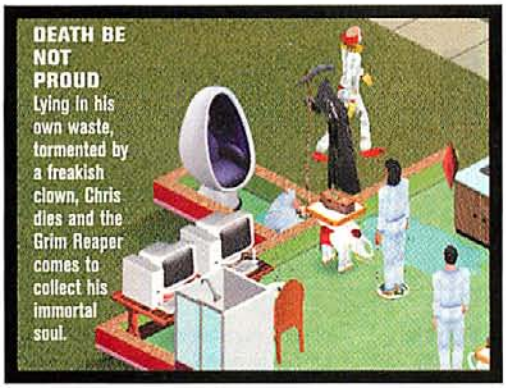
AND AFTER—A SIM CIGARETTE Finally, Sims can enjoy conjugal bliss by disrobing and disappearing under the covers of their swanky vibrating bed.

Murdered your roommate? Is that true?

Michaelfish: You have to understand, Maury, my other roommate and I were driven to it. Before Chris died, he decorated our humble home with several Tragic Clown portraits. At first we thought they were cool, in an ironic, campy sort of way. That was before they summoned the clown himself.

Lovey: I've seen that bugger. He's some kind of eerie.

Michaelfish: He never left us alone. The clown woke us up when we slept, forever got in our way, and pestered us incessantly. We blamed Chris. It was his idea to buy the paintings. We began by torturing him with voodoo dolls.



DEATH BE NOT PROUD Lying in his own waste, tormented by a freakish clown, Chris dies and the Grim Reaper comes to collect his immortal soul.



MORE THAN A PINPRICK Michaelfish endures torture by voodoo doll from his surviving roommate.

Jimmy: That was before you walled him up in the closet and let him die. Did you even try to bargain with Death when he came for Chris?

Michaelfish: My heart wasn't in it. But it was awful to watch him starve. And collapse in a pool of his own urine.

Lovey: You bastard. Why didn't you kill him by building explosive garden gnomes at a workbench? That would've been more humane.



LL COOL J Ladies love cool Jimmy Layabout – five women in love with him and counting. Slacking is all about relationships.

It sounds to me as if the LIVIN' LARGE world is a dangerous place.

Lovey: You got that right, Maury. Sure we have more career and decorating options, but I'd swear that almost any new item can have unexpected consequences.

Jimmy: But they're not all bad. Take the vibrating bed, for instance. Finally, we Sims can play a little Barry White, pop a quarter in the bed, and do some naked wrestling.

Lovey: Oh, and you did plenty of that. Bastard.

Jimmy: What can I say? I'm a serial lady killer. Besides, I remind you, I have to work really hard to maintain friendships if I want to do more than be a personal tour guide.

Lovey: Your career is no harder than any of ours. We all have to work harder than any Sims before us.

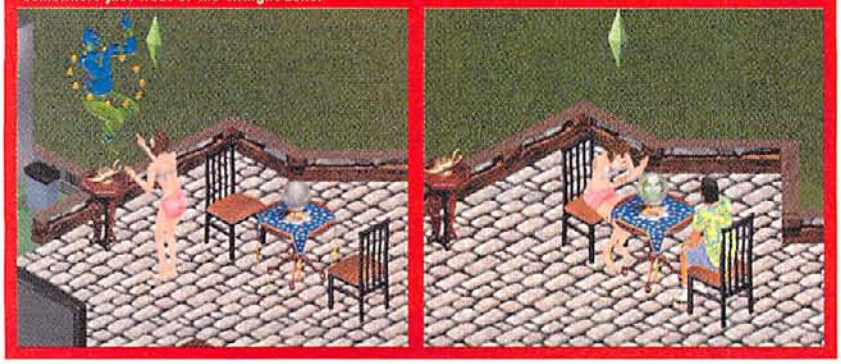
So what's the verdict? Would you rather be livin' large? Or livin' small?

Jimmy: Large all the way, Maury.

Lovey: I don't know that I could ever go back to the old way of living. I feel like a whole new part of the world is open to me – and just because so much of the world is fraught with danger and calamity doesn't mean it's not worthwhile.

Michaelfish: Just don't buy the guinea pig. That thing'll kill you for sure. CGW

ANOTHER WORLD Genies, crystal balls, and a paranormal career path put LIVIN' LARGE neighborhoods somewhere just west of the twilight zone.





ZOOMING IN A close-up of Mika Hakkinen as he handles a damp turn at Silverstone shows off the sleek – if a bit behind the times – car models employed in GRAND PRIX 3.

Mr. Hakkinen, Your Car Is Ready

Introducing the best F1 racing simulator available, warts and all

GRAND PRIX 3

reviewed by Brett Todd

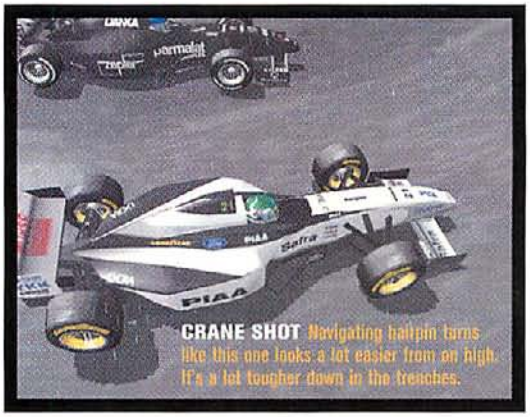
Like most hardcore gamers, racing simulation fans are always in search of the next big thing. This isn't always good. Constantly chasing the latest and greatest is a hollow pursuit that'll make no one happy but the advertising weasels on Madison Avenue. As anyone who's grown out of the N'Sync and Britney phase could tell you, bigger is not necessarily better.

That axiom has never been more true than in the case of GRAND PRIX 3, the latest addition to Geoff Crammond's acclaimed F1 racing series. On paper, it isn't much of an advancement over its immediate ancestor, which arrived on store shelves way back in 1996. Core elements of the code can be traced back to the DOS era; Internet multiplayer modes are nowhere to be found; visual presentation doesn't fully measure up to what most gamers expect today; audio is almost an afterthought... none of which matters a bit. Even though the game doesn't measure up to its more contemporary competitors in terms of feature sets, the top-drawer physics, painstakingly recreated tracks, and flawlessly modeled cars provide an unrivaled sense of intensity and realism. This is the only serious racing sim you need on your hard drive right now.

Impressive, Most Impressive

Of the many impressive facets of GRAND PRIX 3, perhaps the most remarkable is its playability. While there are some very good F1 games out there, players have to overcome a few hurdles before they enjoy them. EA Sports' F1 2000 is a fine title, but has problems with smash-em-up derby driver AI and requires the System of the Gods™ to run at its best. Eidos' F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX buries its acceptable Jack-of-All-Trades approach beneath one of the most irritating interfaces to grace a computer program since the DOS version of WORDSTAR. In contrast, nothing stands between the gamer and the track here. An intuitive interface and simple control schemes – including the automatic calibration of your video setup – make this game almost as readily approachable as PONG. If you aren't battling a field of tough competitors on the streets of Montreal or Monte Carlo within 15 minutes of ripping open the box, you're doing something wrong.

The game grows even more fulfilling after you've been playing for 15 hours. There are five difficulty settings to keep you interested as your skills improve. Driving aids such as automatic braking, show best line, and throttle and steering help provide a crutch during the early races in Rookie and Amateur; they are slowly peeled away until there's nothing between you and the asphalt in Ace. The full complement of 16 FIA tracks from across the globe is included for Quickrace, Practice, Non-Championship Race, and Championship Season modes of play. All can be freely adjusted so that you're running seven laps in the rain at Silverstone, learning the lay of the land at Nurburgring on an unlimited clock, or taking part in the full championship event at Magny Cours. A new wrinkle in the GRAND PRIX series is



CRANE SHOT Navigating hairpin turns like this one looks a lot easier from on high. It's a lot tougher down in the trenches.

CGW RATED

PROS

A perfect simulation of F1 racing in nearly every way.

CONS

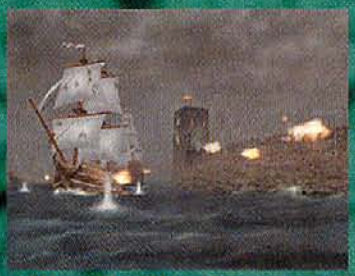
Ancient system architecture doesn't support Internet play; season data is two years out of date.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz or AMD K6-2, 32MB RAM, 80MB hard drive space, 2MB video card, 4X CD-ROM drive.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-III 450MHz or AMD Athlon, 64MB RAM, 320MB hard drive space, 16MB DirectX 7.0-compatible video card.
3D Support: Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 22 via LAN, modem, serial (one CD per player), or hot seat.

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive • **Developer:** Geoff Crammond • **$40** • **www.grandprixgames.com**
ESRB Rating: Everyone

"Think of *Sea Dogs* as *Pirates!* in 3D but with more depth to it... *Sea Dogs* simply looks great."
Gamers Central

"...combines the extremely addictive gameplay of both *Daggerfall* and the old Sid Meier classic, *Pirates!*"
FiringSquad







Sea Dogs is an epic role-playing game for the pirate in all of us. Return to the age of sail as a young captain looking to make a name in the world. Develop your character from humble beginnings and rise to control all of the islands for your country or yourself. You can give your allegiance to one of three countries or choose to serve only yourself as a swashbuckling pirate. Build your wealth and reputation and use it to acquire bigger ships and better crewman. Hire other captains to join you in attacking and capturing other ships or forts. Where you go and what you do is up to you.

The choices in Sea Dogs are endless...

And so is the fun.





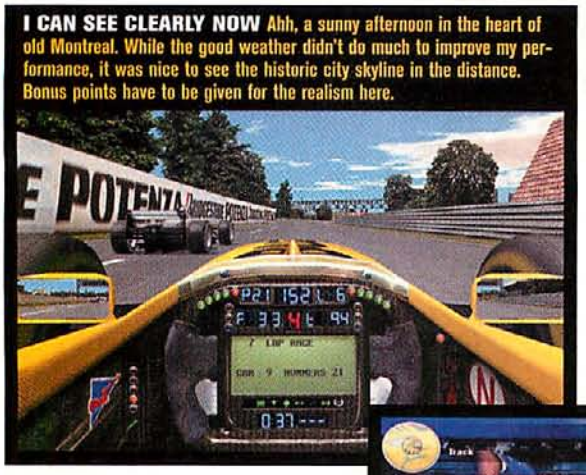
Sea Dogs

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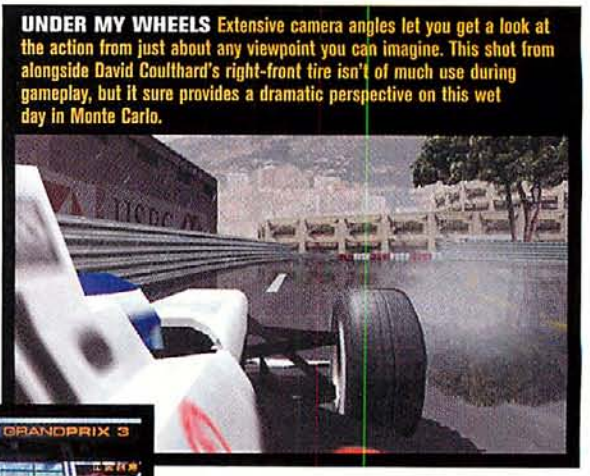
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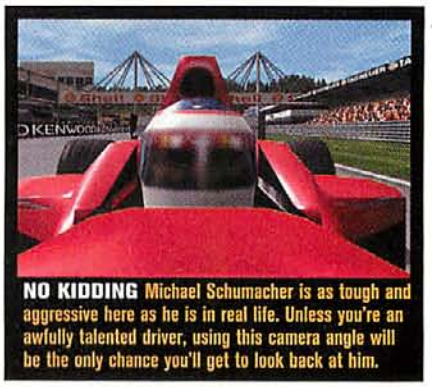
I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW Ahh, a sunny afternoon in the heart of old Montreal. While the good weather didn't do much to improve my performance, it was nice to see the historic city skyline in the distance. Bonus points have to be given for the realism here.



UNDER MY WHEELS Extensive camera angles let you get a look at the action from just about any viewpoint you can imagine. This shot from alongside David Coulthard's right-front tire isn't of much use during gameplay, but it sure provides a dramatic perspective on this wet day in Monte Carlo.



ISN'T THAT THE SCHMATTERHORN? Sixteen tracks from the 1998 F1 circuit are included for your racing pleasure, including the legendary Monza, situated in the scenic Italian Alps.



NO KIDDING Michael Schumacher is as tough and aggressive here as he is in real life. Unless you're an awfully talented driver, using this camera angle will be the only chance you'll get to look back at him.

inclement weather. Set weather to random, and a mid-race cloudburst might force you to pit row for rain tires. A slider bar further adjusts for the chance of precipitation.

Dead-on physics eclipse the most recent holder of the racing sim accuracy crown, F1 2000. Cars accelerate, decelerate, and corner almost exactly as they should, the only discrepancy with the real world being tires that seem too grippy, even in the rain. This doesn't mean that these 800-horsepower monsters are easy to keep on the track. On the contrary, their incredible power is depicted in such frighteningly realistic fashion that you always seem in danger of sliding out of control, or perhaps of just spontaneously combusting. All of this combines to make it clear that every turn of the wheel, every push of the accelerator carries with it consequences. There's a thrilling convergence of excitement and fear that perfectly mimics the unique danger of driving a car at ridiculous speeds.

The damage model heightens these sensations even further. Crammond has done yeoman work here, considering the sins of F1 2000 and F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX. Crack-ups occur just about as often as they should, as long as you're not careening around like an out-of-control missile. All manner of limb-crushing situations seem to be possible, with the exception of rolling a car; I always teetered right on the brink of flipping for a nerve-wracking moment before falling back onto my tires.

Cracks in the Foundation

While GRAND PRIX 3 has surprisingly few drawbacks considering the age of its foundation code, there are nevertheless a few deficiencies. Perhaps the biggest is the absence of proper Internet play. This is sure to be a thorn in the sides of the many gearheads who've come to expect such an option. As I've never been a big fan of playing sports games online with potentially obnoxious strangers named nItrO or ledFoot9, this didn't bother me in the least. Your mileage may vary. Hotseat, modem, serial, and LAN play are supported.

Another significant lapse that some gamers will take issue with is the use of FIA season data from 1998. This doesn't make any sense to me. Were the rights cheaper if Hasbro didn't use the most current information? Thankfully, this has already been somewhat rectified by gamers who've posted more up-to-date car sets, track-side advertising, cockpits, and so on to the Net. To start overhauling the out-of-the-box game, head to one of the best fan Web sites, **www.f1-grandprix3.net**.

Also, Visuals are a little plainer than one might expect in this day and age. We're a long way from the eye candy showcase that is F1 2000; of course, that's not necessarily a bad thing when you consider that nobody outside of SPAR Aerospace was able to get that game running smoothly. My GRAND PRIX 3 performance using a GeForce 2 never dropped below a more than acceptable 27 FPS, and this was with all the details turned on and the resolution cranked up to a crisp 1280x1024. No glaring sacrifices needed to be made to achieve that, either. Although the car models seem a touch dated, the asphalt textures are a little dull, and the background scenery prone to, uh, pixeliciousness, everything is at least passably attractive. And there are some nice counters to this undistinguished style – most notably the mirror-like sheen of the track in the rain. Meticulous track design also helps to offset the blandness. Montreal, a city that I've spent a great deal of time in, features a dead-on re-creation of both the course and the skyline. The sense of immersion while racing there was the most fulfilling I've ever experienced in a driving game.

"No frills" would be the best words to use in describing the audio. All the car effects are exactly the same and brake squeal is uncomfortably thin. No color commentary or other touches have been added to accentuate the TV presentation style. Browsing the menus is accompanied by the same generic technomusak we've all heard a thousand times before. I'm beginning to wonder if all this stuff is being ground out by some guy cooped up in his basement with a Roland keyboard and a Mac.

Finish Line

GRAND PRIX 3 is an excellent game. Some will no doubt criticize it for not being much of an advancement over its predecessor. While that's an observation that can't be denied, it's impossible to be too negative when you're dealing with what is clearly the best F1 simulator on the market today. Rivals such as the outstanding F1 2000 may best it in certain aspects, but this is the complete package.

And that's all that needs be said. Sure, Geoff Crammond and his design team could have done more in terms of providing a few modern amenities, such as sharper graphics and full net play. But even if they'd jammed everything but the proverbial kitchen sink into the box, it's hard to imagine the end product being any more enjoyable than it is now. CGW

A TRANQUIL ALASKAN NIGHT.

SO QUIET, YOU CAN BARELY HEAR A NECK SNAP.





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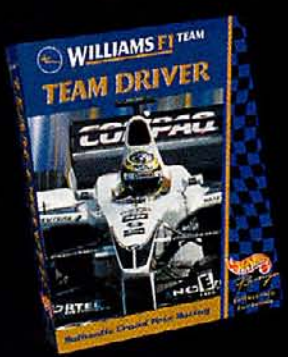
EVERYONE E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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This is as close as you'll get to real F1 action on your PC without adding tires and an engine. With actual WilliamsF1 racing telemetrics, you're in for the ride of a lifetime. Start as a rookie in the Go-Kart series and move up the rankings to F1600, F3 and finally become a real WilliamsF1 team driver. To make it this real, our game designers had to go the extra mile. But it was the greatest 18.2 seconds of their lives! Coming Soon.

Hot Wheels MATTEL Racing

AGE OF EMPIRES once again outgrows its borders

It's Still Good To Be King

AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE CONQUERORS

reviewed by Tom Chick

It's always great to get new stuff for a game you love, but there's always the tricky question of whether you're getting your money's worth. THE CONQUERORS, the expansion for AGE OF EMPIRES II, has two strikes against it: 1) At $30, it's a fairly expensive expansion pack, and 2) the original game is damn near flawless. But the real litmus test for an expansion pack is how much you would miss it if you had to go back to playing the original game without it. AGE OF EMPIRES II without THE CONQUERORS really isn't an option anymore.

The most important changes are also the subtlest. If you play online, you've probably come up against players who litter the map with Town Centers, using them almost like front-line tanks. Town Centers with a complement of Villagers could not only harvest resources, but hold off most casual attacks. A popular cheese tactic was to play as the Teutons and crank out your enhanced Town Centers to shut the other players out of the early expansion phase. Ensemble Studios fixes this in THE CONQUERORS by making Town Centers more expensive and by reducing the Teutons' bonus.



BARBARIANS AT THE GATE A little horse-trading in the Hun campaign lets you unleash a thundering herd of terror onto enemy towns.

Another complaint about AGE OF EMPIRES II was the way you had to constantly visit your farms to rebuild them after they'd been harvested. As the most important source of food in the endgame (when you should be fighting battles), farms become a necessary and nagging bit of micromanagement in an otherwise self-sustaining economy. THE CONQUERORS adds a handy farm queuing option, and it's hard to go back to AGE OF EMPIRES II without it.

Both of these fixes fall into the category of things that should have been in a patch. There are several other patch-worthy tweaks like these. Villagers can be assigned to build a structure and they'll automatically work after it's completed, rather than wait to get orders. Area-of-effect weapons are more careful about friendly fire, and naval units now use the same formations as land units. There are some important balancing tweaks to unit stats and some helpful additions to the interface. All of this is subtle, but crucial enough that Ensemble really owes it to their fans to make these changes available in a free patch.

Fortunately, THE CONQUERORS also contains more traditional value-added features like new units, civilizations, game modes, and single-player campaigns – all are worth the $30 sticker price. The Spaniards and Huns should prove popular among cavalry lovers, while the Mayans easily unseat the Britons as the new lords of archery. New suicide bombers for attacking walls and buildings (Petards), Battering Rams that now work like tanks, Bombard Cannons boosted to the status of junior Trebuchets, and torch-wielding Hun Tarkans all have a dramatic effect on the castle sieges that are such an important part of the endgame. Each civilization also has an exclusive new technology.

The new single-player campaigns are peppered with the unique touches and gameplay twists that keep them from being merely a series of skirmish missions. The new game modes do a great job of focusing the action on a geographical location, which cuts down on the sprawl that makes some AGE OF EMPIRES II endgames overwhelming. In Defend The Wonder, everyone attacks a single player who has to defend a monument. King Of The Hill pits all the players against each other for control of a single monument in the middle of the map. These game types also show the value of the new AI commands that let you make specific requests of computer-controlled allies.

Although a lot of what you'll find in this box really belongs in a patch, most of THE CONQUERORS truly is worthy of an expansion pack. Suffice to say that after THE CONQUERORS, the Age of Kings will never be the same. CGW



ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER This shot is noticeable for what you don't see. Here, area-effect weapons obliterate Korean defenses, rather than their own troops.

CGW RATED

PROS

You'll never want to play AGE OF EMPIRES II the old way again.

CONS

$30 isn't cheap, especially since much of what THE CONQUERORS offers should have been in a patch.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 90MB hard drive space, AGE OF EMPIRES II. **Recommended Requirements:** 64MB RAM, 260MB hard drive space.
3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** Up to eight players via Internet or LAN.

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Ensemble Studios • $30 • www.microsoft.com/games/conquerors/
ESRB Rating: Teen: animated blood and violence.

FORGOTTEN REALMS

ICEWIND DALE™



"It would be a damn shame if you spent your $60 for the month of July on Diablo II and let Icewind Dale pass you by." ~ Daily Radar

"(Icewind Dale) is well suited for fans of Black Isle Studios' previous games, fans of classic hack-and-slash AD&D computer games, and anyone looking for an action-packed role-playing game with a lot of depth." ~ GameSpot

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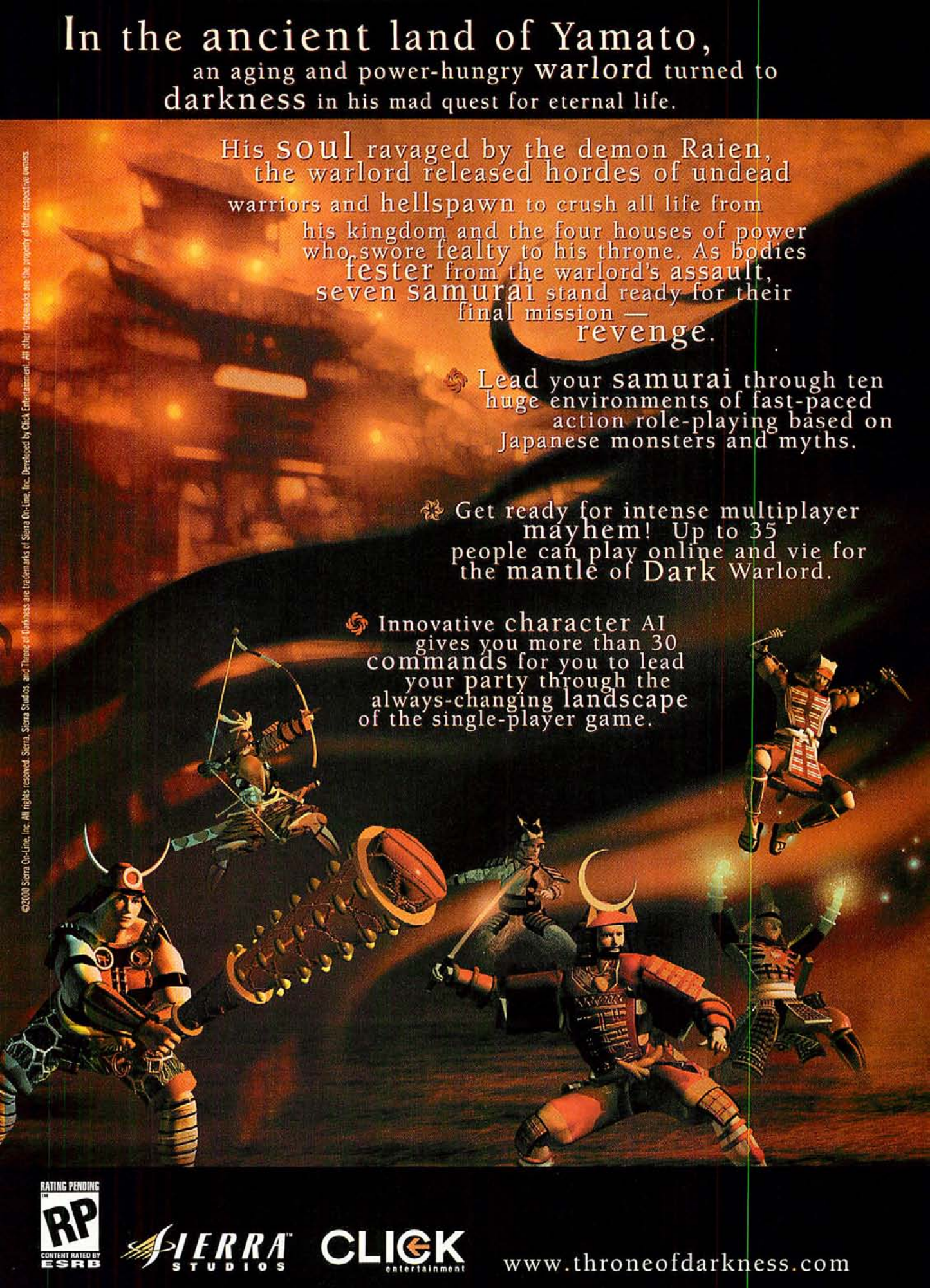
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REACH FOR THE STARS can't quite catch them

Star Search

With hardcore wargames choking out their last dying breaths of commercial viability, "lighter" turn-based strategy games (e.g., anything without panzers) suddenly find themselves the squarest guys on the block. You have to feel sorry for the marketing folks over at the unholy Mattel/SSI/SSG combine trying to find a way to "sex up" REACH FOR THE STARS to compete with younger, firmer, 3D-accelerated, shelf-space neighbors. When your most notable feature is being based on a 20-year-old Apple II game, you've got a hard sell on your hands.

Reviewers experience the same problem. Always on the lookout for a juicy bon mot or spicy witticism, it's hard to sound sexy discussing production queues or combat result matrices. For this reason, and because it gets boring to keep comparing a title to an earlier, better game, I've decided to sex things up for you by replacing every future use of the phrase MASTER OF ORION in this review with the words "Jennifer Lopez."

REACH FOR THE STARS

reviewed by Jason Kapalka



BEGINNING OF DAZE The galactic production queue, complete with rings, wings, and other things.

Apple II Abacus

Most gamers under the age of 30 probably believe the 4X (explore, exterminate, expand, exploit) galactic space-ploitation genre began with Microprose's Jennifer Lopez. In fact, 4X games existed before this classic. Running on a steam-powered Apple II abacus, REACH FOR THE STARS was released early in the Cretaceous period, and, as my press kit insistently tells me, was the genesis of all future galactic conquest games. Jennifer Lopez included.

Along with *CGW*'s own Jeff Green, I was actually alive at this point in time and actually played the original REACH FOR THE STARS, though all I can really remember through the fog of time and senility are lots of little dots and cryptic abbreviations like IND and DEF. Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, this newfangled version has replaced the cryptic abbreviations with cryptic icons, and now has much bigger dots.

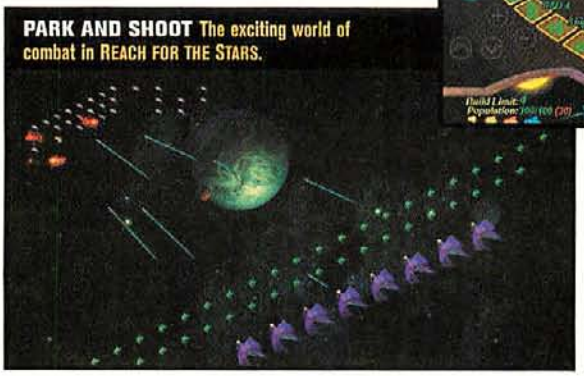
But, as the increasingly desperate Mattel/SSI/SSG prose keeps telling me, "the classic gameplay remains intact." For those who've never experienced Jennifer Lopez, what this means is that you start with one dot, accumulate icons and numbers, and gradually take over all the other dots.

Look, if you have no idea how a space-ploitation game works, you're in the wrong place... flip ahead a few pages till you find a screen of a big rocket phallus. Or something. This isn't for you, pal.

Now, if REACH FOR THE STARS isn't as soul-crushingly spreadsheet-like as the upcoming STARS! SUPERNOVA is likely to be, it certainly makes very few concessions to the eye-candy crowd. One resolution was good enough for your grandpa, and it's good enough for you. Don't even get me started on 3D acceleration, kid. You want flash-bang space fights as in IMPERIUM GALACTICA II or HOMEWORLD? No you don't. Here's what you get: lines of ships. They park facing each other. They shoot little balls or little lines



MINISTRY OF CONFUSION Bonus points: See if you can tell the factories from the labs, or the defense guns from the shipyards, on the colony screen.



PARK AND SHOOT The exciting world of combat in REACH FOR THE STARS.

CGW RATED

PROS

Well balanced; humongous replayability; awesome editing suite.

CONS

Abstract, bizarro interface; distinct lack of sexiness.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: Up to 8 players via LAN, TCP/IP, or Mplayer.

Publisher: Mattel • Developer: SSG • $50 • www.ssionline.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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YOU ARE HERE The mini-map showing the whole galaxy. Sadly, this is actually the most efficient way to play the game, making it look all too similar to the original Apple II version.

for a while. Then some explode.

Keys, Wings, and Rings

Interface-wise, the new REACH FOR THE STARS is creative in the worst way. Apparently dissatisfied with the boring old buttons, windows, and menus of the 20th Century, the designers have opted to invent a futuristic interface where the dominant elements are keys, wings, and rings. So, if you want to build a cannon for defensive purposes, you click the roundish button on the "key," which brings up the "wing" showing your planet, which, oddly enough, consists of a bunch of "rings." Then you find something that looks (sort of) like a cannon and click to place it in the planetary build queue. With me so far?

Now, sooner or later your gun will get built, but let's say you need it pretty soon, owing to a monstrous Hive invasion fleet parked above your planet, vomiting down nasty plasma death. Now you click on the wrench-looking thing on the "key" to get the empire-wide building queue wing-thing (complete with rings). See, your bombarded colonists on Oxnair IV may have that gun as their highest priority, but the Bureaucrats of Default Build Order may have decided to prioritize some labs and McDonalds franchises on Ixnay III and IV before getting around to that defense installation.

Luckily, you can now click the swoopy thing to the right of the ring-things on the wing to change these priorities. (And yes, now I've given even myself a headache.)

To be fair, once you've figured out the rings, wings, and things, the system works pretty well, though you may well long for the less abstract interface of Jennifer Lopez. From here, it's a pretty standard drill: Make stuff that makes other stuff, so you can colonize more planets to make more stuff, and along the way, research new stuff to make and kill all the other intelligent races in the galaxy.

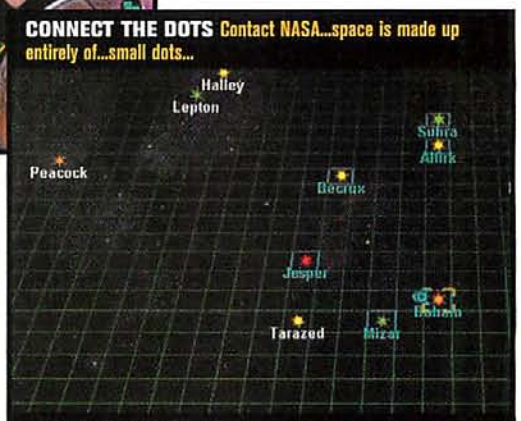
Rinzi Plinzi Bafflegab

The tech tree is – surprise! – a bit weird. Each of the 20 different races has its own separate tree divided into ten eras, each with an assortment of different devices to research. You can jump ahead to later eras without researching all, or even any, of the inventions in your current era, but many of the later inventions have earlier ones as prerequisites.

If you're not confused yet, no problem: Each race also has different names for every single piece of technology, so you'll spend a while playing as the Myrmod race before realizing that their Rinzi-Plinzi is in fact your familiar friend, Mr. Laser Gun Mark I, under a nom de bafflegab. A bit later, you'll puzzle out that the Glurby-Wurby and Beffle-Snab are actually just Engine Type I and Engine Type II.

Unfortunately, the tech tree's creativity lies mostly in these wacky names, which basically boil down to lasers, missiles, shields, and engines of increasing bigness. You'll find no nifty Black Hole Generators or Stasis Fields here. It's a little depressing to work up to level-10 tech just to see a text box reading, "+5% penetration."

Ship design and combat are likewise complex but unsatisfying. There are apparently lots and lots of calculations going on: outer screen defenses, ECM, shield penetration, relative ship speeds, long-, medium-, short-range combat values, and so forth. But none are realized in a visceral way, thanks to the "park and shoot" combat resolution.



CONNECT THE DOTS Contact NASA...space is made up entirely of...small dots...



TREE-RING CIRCUS Should you develop the Blasu-Fil, or the Blort-Nargrap? Perhaps the Boris-Naku is more crucial! But then again, the Vulgron-Thast has its charms...

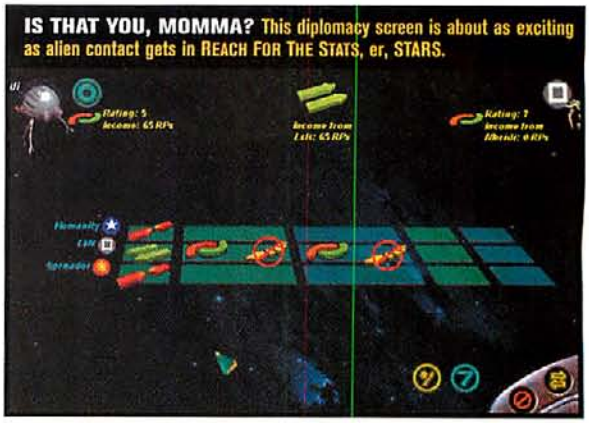
Tastes Like Yearning

The same colorlessness afflicts the different alien races. While there are a huge number to choose from – each with distinct characteristics for combat, trade, and colonization – none of them really have any character. They're all just a bunch of numbers. The diplomatic model – a grid similar to old WARLORDS games – is functional but lacks the flavor of previous hits within this subgenre. No ambassadors barking "This means WAR!," just a few lines of icons. A little more characterization – hell, any characterization – would have gone a long way.

On the plus side, REACH FOR THE STARS is well-balanced and hugely replayable, containing a lengthy campaign game, several dozen scenarios, a random-map generator, and a super-cool editing system that lets you tweak practically every aspect of the game.

Sadly, all the replayability in the world doesn't mean a whole lot when the game's just not that much fun to play in the first place. Between the weird abstraction of the interface and the blandness of the technology, combat, and aliens, SSI's space-ploitation offering ultimately comes across as competent but boring.

It may have been first, but Jennifer Lopez still does it better. CGW



IS THAT YOU, MOMMA? This diplomacy screen is about as exciting as alien contact gets in REACH FOR THE STATS, er, STARS.

Get to the finish line any freakin' way you can.

8 new screaming machines are hitting the streets of San Francisco and London. Not to mention the buildings, fountains and shopping malls. The only rule in this race is: There aren't any rules.







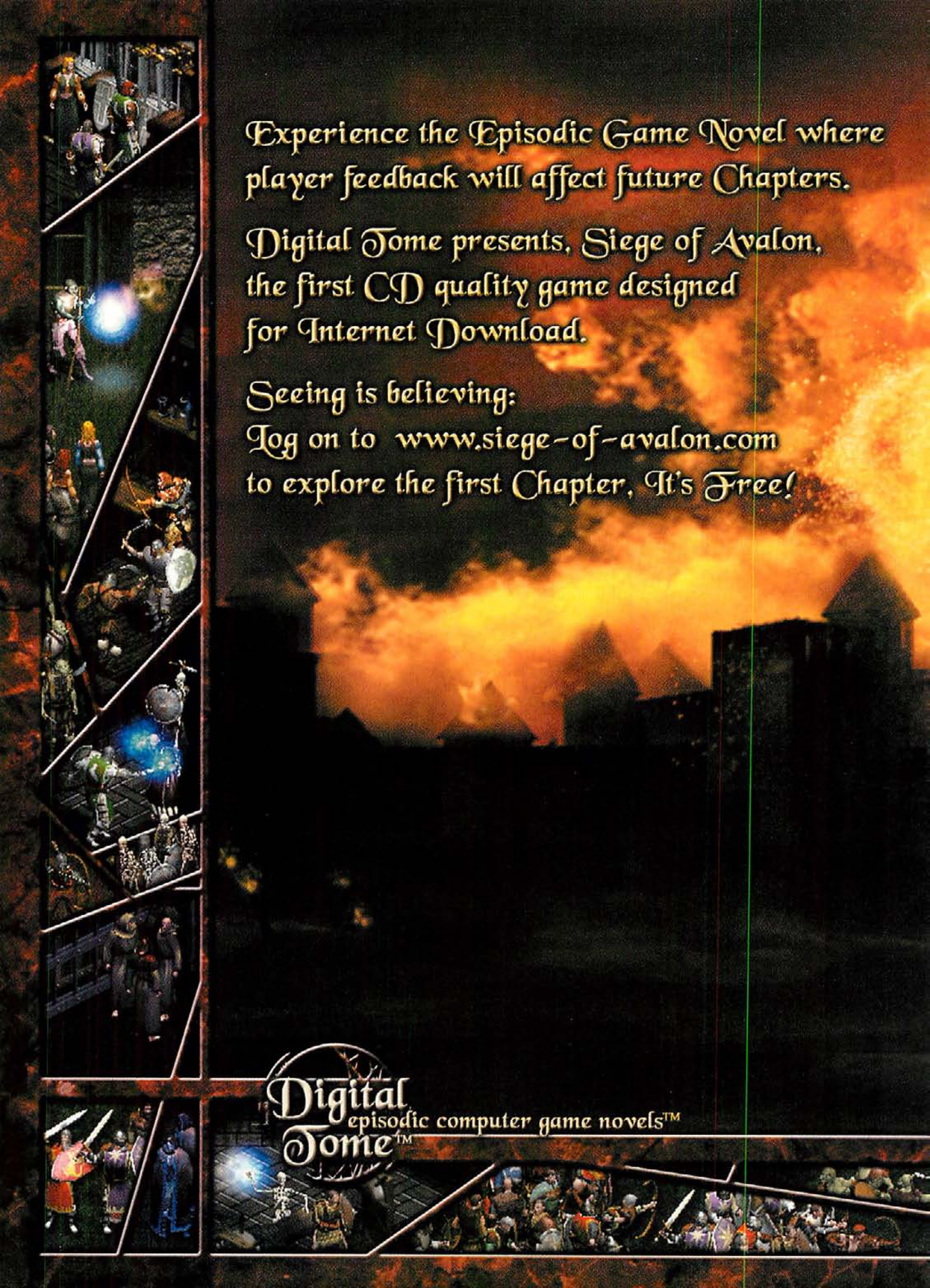
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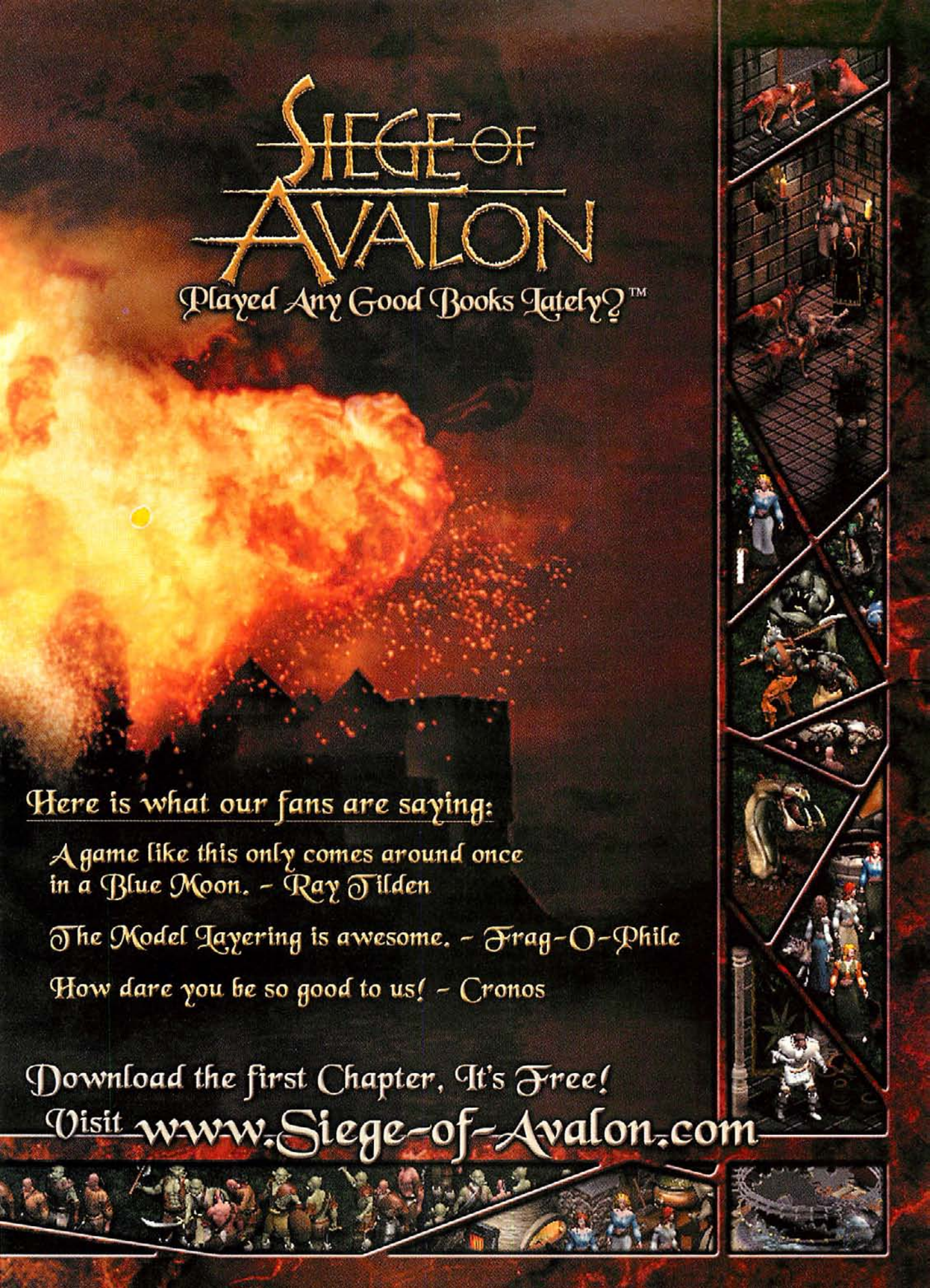
www.microsoft.com/games/midtown2

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SUBMARINE TITANS deserves das boot

Sink, Sank, Sunk

How can you go wrong with a real-time strategy game that has bomb-wearing suicide dolphins, massive vacuum quake bombs, and those bioluminescent jellyfish ships from *The Abyss*? Ellipse Studios answers that question in SUBMARINE TITANS – an inspired, beautiful, heartbreaking mess of a game.

SUBMARINE TITANS
reviewed by Tom Chick

A Three Hour Tour Into Hell

The basic twist in this real-time strategy game is that you're underwater. Although there are a few different tile sets, the basic look of the terrain is cool deep sea blue with colorful coral abounding. The screen is full of tiny moving squid, rays, and lobsters. Bubbles rise as gently as the lilting underwatery soundtrack. But then combat begins, the dopey action music kicks in, and all hell breaks loose. What was a lovely and serene virtual aquarium becomes a virtually unplayable real-time loss of control, not unlike reaching into a tank to grab a handful of bright tropical fish and feeling them slip through your helpless fingers.

The interface in SUBMARINE TITANS is horrible. Game-killingly horrible. The tiny buttons and icons are scattered across sliding panels and submenus. There is no way to queue tech research, construction orders, or waypoints. If you want to lay a minefield or a line of sonar beacons, you have to tag along behind the appropriate sub, and... drop...each...one...manually. There is no hotkey to change the game speed and you cannot interact with any part of the game while it's paused. SUBMARINE TITANS is full of the sort of interface decisions that make you wonder if the developers ever played an RTS game.

SUBMARINE TITANS deserves better, because there are some welcome concepts here. As you move further along the tech tree, you have to make decisions about whether to go for blunt force or special abilities. There are ways to capture enemy units and technologies, spy on the enemy by hacking into his computers, and bypass his armor to damage his ships with sonic waves. The three sides are each distinct, with well-balanced units and the special abilities. The Silicons' colorful organic look, equal parts Dr. Seuss and *The Abyss*, is a great contrast to the sleek militaristic White Sharks and the rounded edges and domes of the Black Octopi.

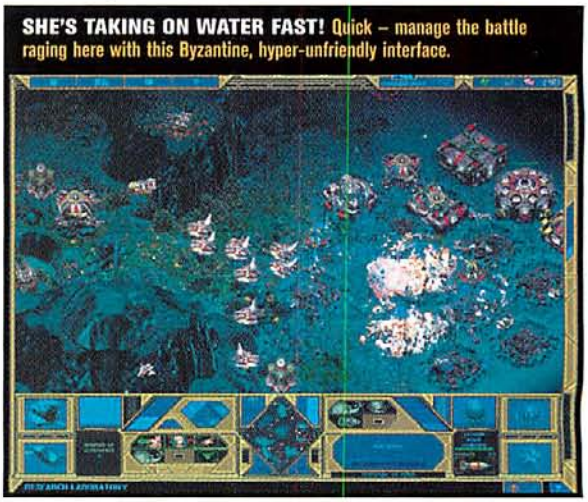
Lost at Sea

But many of the game's good ideas are poorly realized. Underwater caves that hide your units from the enemy are a good idea, but not when they hide your units from you. Five levels of depth to represent vertical combat are a good idea, but not when the game's 2D graphics can't make sense of it. A tech tree stuffed with trumps and counter-trumps is a good idea, but not when it's a poorly organized series of nonsense names and tiny icons. Limited ammo to prevent rushes is a good idea, but not when you have no control over the resupply of your units. Most importantly, a game with lots of different kinds of units, buildings, technologies, and special abilities is a good idea, but not when it's locked into the hyperactive pace of TOTAL ANNIHILATION, without any help from the interface to make it manageable. There's a lot of nuance here, but there's no way to play it.

The underwater angle is a good idea, but the gameplay is just business as usual but with underwater graphics. Buildings use "oxygen" instead of energy, there are five levels of "depth," and your minimap uses "sonar" instead of "radar." The game does nothing with the unique aspects of pressure, light, speed, or sound in an underwater setting. Except for the little schools of fish swimming around, SUBMARINE TITANS might as well be a good-looking sloppy game about floating tanks. CGW



I RESEARCHED WHAT? Two faces of the tech tree in all its colorful and confusing glory.


SHE'S TAKING ON WATER FAST! Quick – manage the battle raging here with this Byzantine, hyper-unfriendly interface.

CGW RATED

PROS
A novel and nuanced concept...

CONS
...completely torpedoed by clumsy execution; the frontrunner for "Worst Interface of the Year."

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 140MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (2-24 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: Strategy First • **Developer:** Ellipse Studios • $40 • www.subtitans.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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BLOCKED OPPORTUNITY Logic puzzles involving pushing blocks should be banished into the same pit of hell where the maze burns.



FLEET OF FEET Here's how you can have a jumping puzzle without actually jumping.



COLT .45 AND A DECK OF CARDS This is the *Magic: The Gathering* influence. You can buy and trade new Talents online; too bad the initial Talents aren't that great.

SANITY falls short of its ambitions

Not Playing With a Full Deck

The designers of SANITY: AIKEN'S ARTIFACT have managed to answer the ancient Zen paradox: "How does one create a jumping puzzle when the main character can't jump?"

Too bad it's a question no one but crazed, cave-dwelling philosophers bothers asking.

SANITY almost has "it". The game presents a lot of interesting design ideas, but they fall apart amidst very real problems like interface issues, clichéd puzzles, and uninspired weapons.

You, as voiced by Ice-T, play Cain – a psionic policeman. Psionic powers are called Talents here, and are found in Talent cards (think *Magic: The Gathering*). Cain starts off knowing a few Talents in the Fire Totem (a Talent categorization system), and throughout the game, he'll pick up more Talent cards to add power to his formidable mind. The clichéd story involves an unearthed artifact, Very Important Children, and awakening a massive apocalyptic evil dude.

SANITY: AIKEN'S ARTIFACT

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

SANITY uses the LithTech engine, but you wouldn't really know it at first. For one thing, the game is played top-down. The camera either automatically follows Cain (*very* annoying), or the camera stays fixed, moving only when you decide to rotate it. Using LithTech 1.5, the game manages to look both very pretty and to run smoothly. Levels engage in ample use of colored lighting and architecture, and the visual effects for the Talents are as bright and colorful as any traditional comic-book superpower.

MYST-y Eyed

It's too bad that such a pretty engine is saddled with poorly conceived and executed puzzles. It's admirable that SANITY tries to break away from the action-mold by adding elements from adventure games. I liked how the bosses require cunning rather than blatant force. I was amused by the insane life-or-death game show. Yet, these interesting ideas are overshadowed by tired game-filler such as block-pushing puzzles and the aforementioned jumping puzzles (by the way, the answer to the paradoxical question is, "we'll give the player temporary levitation as a power"). We even get the traditional "do silly task for me in order to get important item" puzzle. At one point Cain asks, "Who the HELL would install invisible floating platforms in a power station?" While I appreciate the attempt at self-conscious humor, the self-awareness doesn't absolve the designers of the sin of unoriginality. Also, some puzzle solutions are just plain bizarre. In order to sneak into a tour, I have to beat up a civilian and steal his shirt? Do the words "police brutality" mean anything in the SANITY universe?

Talent Show Supreme

The Talents are nearly great. The trouble is, the different Totems all have similar Talents. Every Totem has a projectile, a forcefield, a summoning, a spell that affects the ground, etc. The colors are different but the underlying design is the same. There're a scant few truly unique Talents, while the rest mostly follow a formula. It would have added a lot more strategy and depth if the Totems had more specialized Talents (like Science's Shield-Shatterer or Illusion's Invisibility). The Talents you can buy for multiplayer are a step in the right direction, but then again, you do have to shell out more money to get them.

Finally, the interface could use a lot more work. Instead of the tried-and-true "click on a spot to go there," you have to hold down the mouse button to get Cain moving. This sounds petty, but it translates into babysitting Cain past the most minute of obstacles, and more camera movement than necessary.

I wanted to like SANITY. It almost has the vibe of a hip, slick, over-the-top comic book. But the puzzles, the disappointing execution of the Talents, and the interface all fall short of what could've been great. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Beautiful LithTech engine adds some nice design elements to basic gameplay.

CONS

Mind-numbing clichés; the Talents aren't used to their full potential.

Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 450MHz, 96MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (1-8 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Fox Interactive • Developer: Monolith • $40 • www.sanitygame.com • ESRB Rating: Teen (13+); animated violence.

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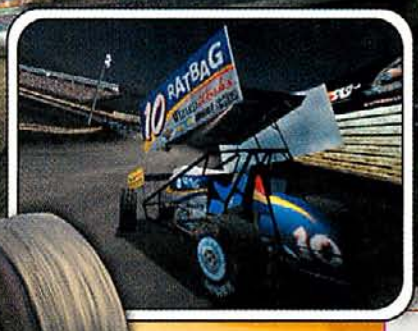
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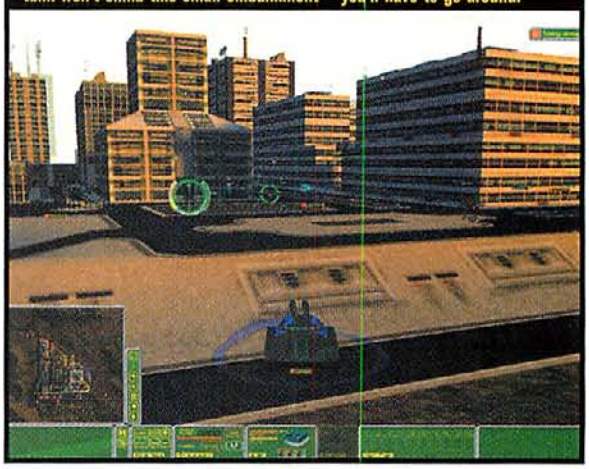
So many puns, so little time for this dog of an RTS

Dogs of Bore

A BUG'S STRIFE O.K., even though they're ripped straight from *Starship Troopers*, the giant bug-like Mantai are pretty cool. Maybe if the game was just about them... nah, it would still suck.



OUT OF CONTROL Letting the player take direct control over individual units is a good idea, but the controls are highly problematic; plus, this tank won't climb this small embankment – you'll have to go around.



Don't be fooled by the fact that TalonSoft, a publisher with a reputation for hardcore wargame simulations, is behind this game. Nothing about DOGS OF WAR says "simulation," "hardcore," or even "entertainment." This is a joyless and frustrating experience disguised as a ground-breaking blend of real-time strategy and action. Maybe if it wasn't such an ugly game to look at, or if the controls were somewhat manageable, or if the voice acting wasn't so grating, or if the plot wasn't so formulaic, or...well, you get the point. There's a lot wrong with DOGS OF WAR and very little right. That's too bad, because if the game had delivered on some of its concepts, it might have been a very fresh experience.

DOGS OF WAR

reviewed by Tom Price

I Can't See Clearly Now

DOGS OF WAR is one of the new tactical-style real-time strategy games where basebuilding and resource harvesting are ditched in favor of pure combat action. The graphics engine is 3D based, but you'll have difficulty utilizing or even appreciating it due to the nearly unusable camera controls. The only 3D RTS game to offer a usable camera-control system was GROUND CONTROL, and Massive Entertainment hit that nail so dead on the head that everyone else should just copy what they did. In the case of DOGS OF WAR, the limitations of the camera could be a good thing considering how ugly and boring the graphics are. The artwork is pedestrian and unintriguing, and there are a lot of missing textures and exposed polygon seams.

Designer Silicon Dreams tries to inject action elements into its tactical-RTS gameplay by allowing you to place yourself in direct control of any individual unit under your command. This sounds like a cool idea except for the fact that units are near impossible to control. Response is laggy, there is no mouse look, and you're limited to forward, backward, and turning motions. Not that control in standard RTS-mode is any easier. Sure, the unit-grouping function is easily accessed on your HUD, but it's hard to tell which units you have currently selected. Add crummy pathfinding to the AI and you've got an incredibly frustrating experience.

Wot the Smeg?!

Even more annoying than the interface is the terrible voice-acting. Craig Charles, better known as "Dave Lister" on the wacky English space-sitcom *Red Dwarf*, handles a good deal of the voiceover work, and his brogue is serviceable in parts, but it quickly grows annoying. He even overuses the word "smeg," his catch-word on *Red Dwarf*. What connection do DOGS OF WAR and *Red Dwarf* share? None. How annoying is it to hear Lister say smeg every two minutes? Extremely. Lister, please, keep your smegging in context.

At least the designers give you more than two factions to choose from and play through in campaign mode. (You mean it will take a lot longer to finish this game? Ah, smeg.) In addition to the Imperial Order and Warmonkeys, you'll also play as the Mantai – a group of giant bugs that look like they were cribbed from *Starship Troopers*.

I guess this game could be a lesson in good intent, wasted on sloppy design. The idea of being able to jump into the driver seat of a vehicle you control in RTS mode is a good one, and should continue to be explored. If DOGS OF WAR has any value, it's as a cautionary tale for future RTS explorers. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

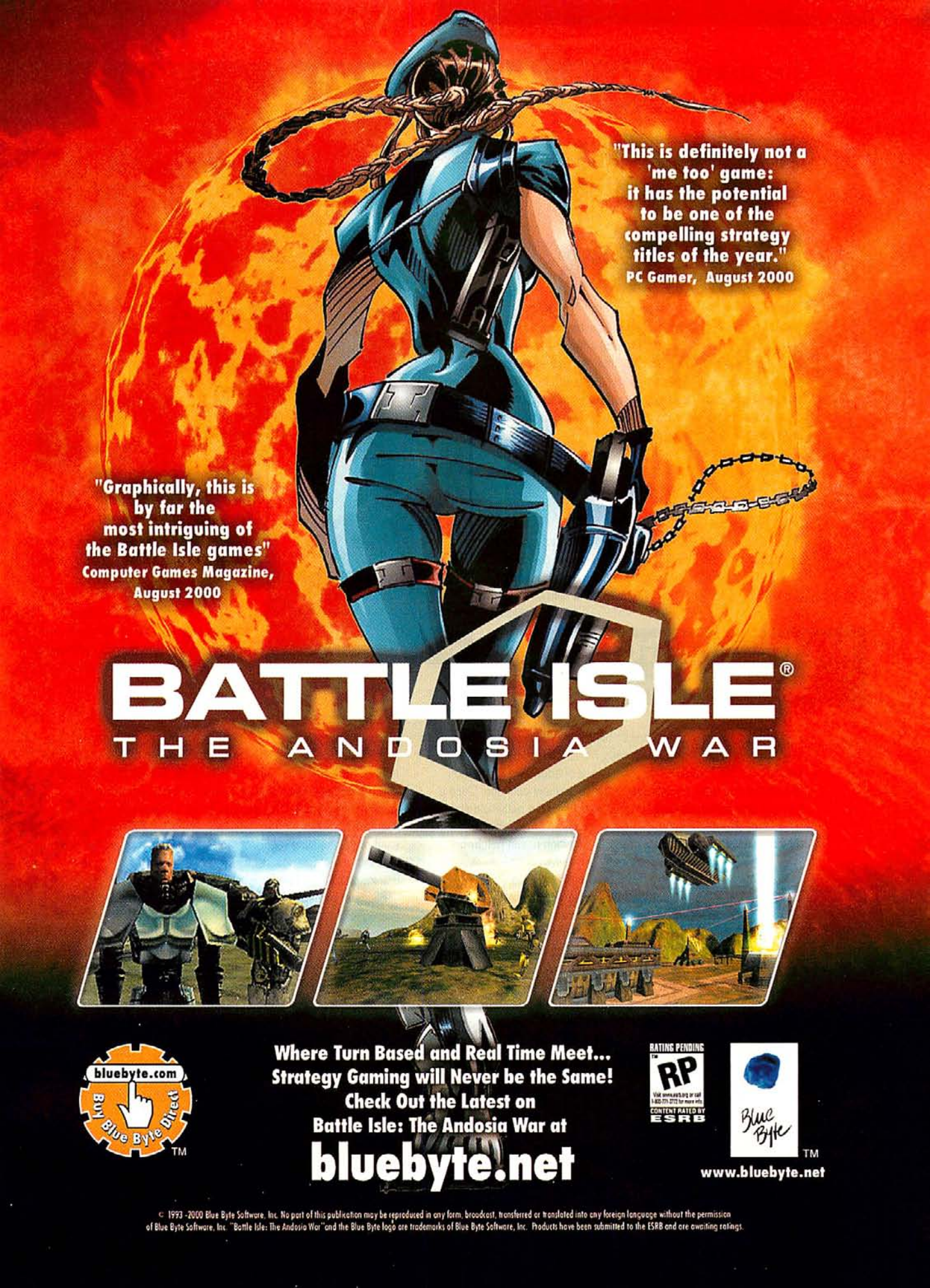
Tries out some new ideas in the RTS realm.

CONS

Fails with most of the basics.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz, 32 MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64 MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2-8 players, LAN or Internet

Publisher: TalonSoft • Developer: Silicon Dreams • $40 • www.talonsoft.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence.

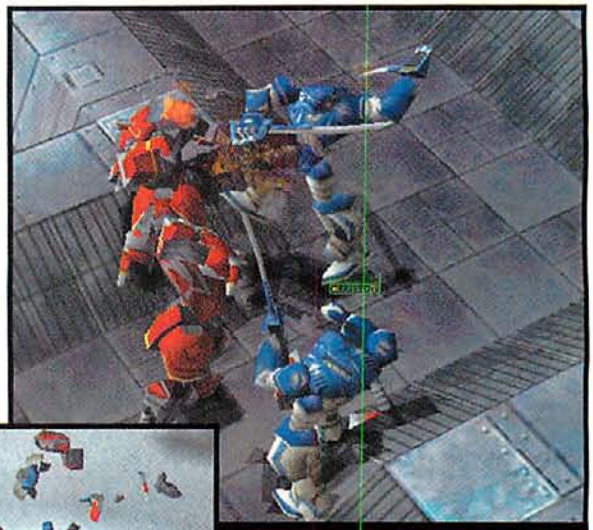


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The giant robots of METAL FATIGUE trip over tiny details

Animetal Monsters

By taking the giant brawling robots traditional to anime such as *Gundam*, offering a high degree of customization, and then splitting the battlefield into ground, air, and subterranean levels, METAL FATIGUE offers something different, interesting, and even exciting...and then falls into the same traps that snared dozens of previous real-time strategy games. So, while METAL FATIGUE's unique style and play stand out from the crowd, the game ends up to be just as chaotic and cumbersome as countless others among the RTS masses.



COM TO PAPA Combots slash, fire, kick, and generally bust heads when they meet roboto-a-roboto. Fluid animations and detail graphics bring these battles to life.



METAL LAPSE Far too often, massed units fight chaotically in uber-battles, and when the units are large and complex, it becomes hard to track the action.

METAL FATIGUE
reviewed by Thomas L. McDonald

Don't Call Them 'Mechs

The battlefield of METAL FATIGUE is dominated by Combots: giant custom-fitted robots that tower over conventional units. Combots are built piece-by-piece – arms, legs, torso, and crew plugged together and sent on their way to wreak havoc. Each side starts with a few unique parts, accumulating the rest by scavenging the battlefield and researching recovered enemy gear. Combot battles are a real thrill, as their brightly colored parts spin, kick, slash, hit, and fire at each other in a variety of fluid animations. The prominence of edged weapons such as *katana*s and laser swords make dismemberment common. Once a battle is over, vulturous hover trucks swarm onto the battlefield and carry components back to base to be fitted onto new Combots. Since each side has a distinct color, it's common to see patchwork 'bots bashing at each other in furious hand-to-hand combat.

The focus on Combots makes a sharp departure from similar titles by limiting conventional ground units to a scant six: tank, missile launcher, artillery, unarmed drill truck, unarmed hover truck for construction, and a special anti-Combot weapon. The only time foot infantry appear is after they've ejected from their Combot – about one second before they're squashed under a giant metal foot.

The colorful Combots are pretty much the only element of the game that is visually appealing. Terrain and basic unit graphics are competent but terribly drab and familiar, and maps feel a bit cramped. The engine and interface is serviceable, offering a rotate-able, zoom-able, 3D view of the battlefields along with all the expected RTS features: unit grouping, attack states, patrol points, etc. Menu bars are bulky and unattractive, however, and the entire interface could use streamlining; though, on the positive side, far more functions are bound to hotkeys than in a common strategy game. Splitting the battlefield into three levels adds yet another layer of complexity, and while there are some tactically interesting moments, three-level battles can become massive headaches of micro-management.

Mental Fatigue

Compounding METAL FATIGUE's problems are the standard pathfinding issues, which are doubly difficult given the huge size difference between small units and Combots. The small combat units play a peripheral role, offering cover and drawing fire from the enemy's small units. They also get in the way and make it almost impossible for Combots to maneuver in numbers. Grouped units get stuck with infuriating regularity, and a loaded Combot stuck behind a piddling row of tanks is just a sitting duck. Only the two air units have decent mobility and perform useful battlefield functions.

Plenty of gameplay options are available, including custom skirmishes, eight-person multiplay, and a narrative campaign centered on three brothers who find themselves at odds over an alien relic. Their feud leads each to join different corporate factions, known as "CorpoNations": the mystical Neuropa; the militaristic Mil-Agro; and the even-handed Rimtech. Each brother is the focus of a campaign comprised of ten missions, with unique narrative threads and different technologies. Bonus points are awarded for successful campaign missions, enabling you to dole out upgrades for the next mission.

Thanks to these options and the robotic twist, METAL FATIGUE can be fun. But the frustrations and failures that have unfortunately become part and parcel of the RTS experience fight against you at every step. There's no denying the appeal of custom-built giant 'bots fighting with swords and power-fists, but there's no escaping the little annoyances that ultimately undermine the whole. CGW

CGW RATED



PROS
Three planes of combat and highly customizable battling robots provide plenty of gameplay options.

CONS
Dreary maps, too much micro-management, and, of course, the requisite terrible RTS pathfinding.

Requirements: Pentium 200Mhz, 32MB RAM, 60MB hard drive space, 8MB 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2-8, LAN or Mplayer (one CD per player).

Publisher: TalonSoft • Developer: Zono, Inc. • $40 • www.metalfatigue.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

A Plague Falls Upon The Land and Enemies become Allies

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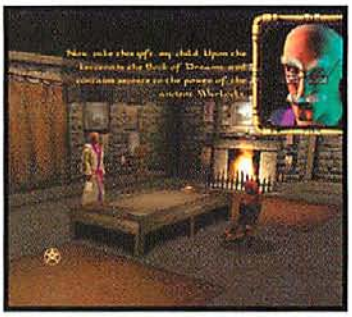
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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SOULBRINGER



You can't help but feel kind of sorry for SOULBRINGER. Released under the giant shadows of DIABLO 2 and ICEWIND DALE, it hardly registered on the gaming landscape. Though I'd like to say it deserved a better fate than that, well...it doesn't. Not quite. This 3D action/RPG from Gremlin Interactive (who created the underrated REALMS OF THE HAUNTING a few years back) does a few things quite nicely: It tells a nifty (though hardly original) little fantasy story; it features a very pretty 3D engine with a MYTH-style isometric perspective; it has nice music and sound; it has a cool macro-based combat system; and it showcases some of the best motion-captured combat animation I've seen in an RPG. All good. But as much as it gets right, it blows. The 3D engine *looks* great, but ultimately is extremely frustrating, as you'll spend more time just trying to position the camera and move your character than you will actually solving any puzzles. The motion-capture animation looks great, but it's butt-slow – I was loathe to pick up items I needed or to open doors just because it took too damn long. The interface is needlessly ugly and confusing, and the inexplicable lack of an auto-map makes it hard to keep track of where you are. It's not awful, but it could have been way, way better. Wait for the bargain bins. *–Jeff Green*

★★½☆☆

Genre: Role-playing • **Publisher:** Interplay • **Developer:** Gremlin Interactive/Infogrames • $30 www.interplay.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated blood and violence; use of tobacco and alcohol

CLEOPATRA

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Sierra Studios **Developer:** Impressions Games • $20 • cleopatra.impressionsgames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone



"So it shall be written, so it shall be done.....again." That's the motto behind CLEOPATRA, an expansion pack for PHARAOH, Sierra's mission-based game of ancient city and dynasty building.

Both the gameplay and graphics of CLEOPATRA are basically the same as PHARAOH: As ruler, you must keep your citizens happy, fat, and culturally developed, all the while protecting Egypt from attackers.

★★★☆☆

CLEOPATRA adds a few new industries to assist in building structures, which (with a lot of praying) can now be erected fairly quickly. Upset your deities, and you'll suffer new curses from the gods that include locusts, hail, and rivers of blood.

Unfortunately, CLEOPATRA doesn't clean up some of the irritating bugs that plagued PHARAOH. Workers still wander about aimlessly, and there are unexplained production stoppages. Also, the new giant scorpion attacks seem only to irritate and slow down the already lengthy missions. There's a lot of combat in CLEOPATRA, but, as in PHARAOH, leading your troops to battle is mostly a boring mouse-clicking exercise.

Forgiving Pharaohs will likely find themselves wrapped up in CLEOPATRA's 15 very hard missions spread over four campaigns. But with more polish it could've been an expansion pack for the ages. *–Mark Brooks*

SYDNEY OLYMPICS 2000

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** Eidos **Developer:** ATD • $35 • www.olympicvideogames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone



Until someone can figure out a better control configuration for track & field games than the old button-tapping frenzy, Olympic-themed games will never really surpass the sublime simplicity of the old Konami arcade stand-ups TRACK & FIELD and HYPER SPORTS. Eidos' new officially-licensed Olympic product, SYDNEY OLYMPICS 2000, doesn't do anything new control-wise, or anything else-wise. The 12 events range from OK (Javelin, Kayaking), to annoying (Platform Diving, Skeet Shooting) to buggy (Cycling). Arcade mode is the quickest way in and out of this tedious gaming experience, but the full Olympic mode shouldn't be glossed over. It adds a career mode that allows you to enhance an athlete's skills in preparation for the Olympic big time. It's a fairly well-executed mode that's wasted on an otherwise buggy and unsatisfying game. Unless you're in support of self-flagellation as an Olympic event, you'll want to skip this game and watch the real deal on T.V. *–Tom Price*

★★☆☆☆



BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** Red Storm Entertainment• **Developer:** Rayland Interactive • $35 • www.redstorm.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

Bang!... Bang! Bang! That's the sound of your synapses firing, searching for a reason to keep playing this shallow game after the first ten minutes. You play a lone pilot of a faceless alien race, fighting other faceless adversaries, and gameplay couldn't be more comatose – actually, it *can* during the narration by a drunk Tom Brokaw clone during 30+ minutes of indifferent cutscenes.

Sporadically, BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE can be pointless arcade fun, but a serious gamer will put this game down after a few missions. The 19 levels don't offer much variety or ingenuity as you hop from galaxy to galaxy, protecting the good guys while fighting an endless stream of "alien" enemies that all sound like pissed-off Russians. Enemy AI isn't great, with only a few ships showing signs of intelligence by hiding behind asteroids.

★★½☆☆

Sure, the game looks good while you're tearing through nebulas and asteroid fields with 10 vivid weapons, but beyond that, there's no there there. You can't substitute cotton candy for the meat and potatoes of strategy and a good plotline. Try STARLANCER or FREESPACE 2 if you want a game with substance, 'cause BANG! doesn't cut it. *–Jason Babler*











An Avenging Angel



The alien Catteni forces have crushed Earth. Humanity has been enslaved. All hope is lost, until a defiant Angel Sanchez and her band of rebels appear on the scene to exact revenge and take back the planet. Join Angel in the fight to restore FREEDOM – at any price!

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NEW FEATURES IN WINDOWS ME PROMISE MORE STABILITY FOR GAMERS

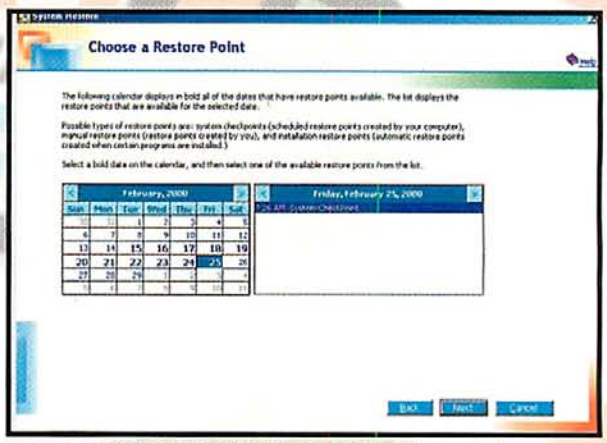
I've Got the Windows in ME

In a lot of ways, Windows Millennium Edition (ME) is to Windows 98 what Windows 98 was to Windows 95. No, that's not a Zen riddle, it's just that both Windows 98 and Windows ME represent evolutionary improvements over their predecessors, and neither is a significant departure from the real guts of the OS. Unfortunately, despite several welcome improvements, some of Windows 9X's warts do remain.

by Dave Salvator



Windows ME promises to improve several areas, most notably digital media, system stability ("PC Health", as Microsoft puts it), and the fast-boot feature. What will interest gamers are the added features to improve overall system stability, which are System File Protection (SFP) and the System Restore utility. The SFP feature basically write-protects about 800 key system files—essential DLLs, and INF files, for example—and won't allow a game's installer to overwrite these files with older or tweaked versions. In the past, games and other applications have been guilty of this and it can cause system instability. The other half of this dynamic duo is System Restore, which takes "snap-shots" of your system's setup (registry settings, etc.). What's cool about this feature is that it can take these snap-shots on a daily basis, or you can take one before you're about to, say, install a new 3D card. That way, if the install goes awry, you should be able to return your system to its previous state with minimal headache. Think of it as a time machine.



BACK TO A BETTER PLACE Using Windows ME's new System Restore, you can return to a previous (working) system state, hopefully saving you from yet another Windows re-install.

The Windows Help and Support application (a greatly enhanced, Internet-aware help engine) states that it requires at least

GADGET OF THE MONTH



For years, we've used Zip disks to continue our office gaming at home. Most save-games will fit neatly on those 100MB disks. But how about carting MP3s, images or bigger save-games, or entire game installs? Zip disks just run out of gas. A new company called Minds@Work has taken a 6GB hard drive and packaged it so that it's mobile and will connect to any PC via USB. You've got 6GB of mobile storage in a package not much bigger than a cassette case. You can install games on the Digital Wallet, but don't expect blazing performance. Because of USB's peak data rate, the best throughput you can hope for is around 1.5MB/sec, more likely closer to 1MB/sec. Not bad, but very slow compared to new EIDE drives. But the high portability factor is a very cool way to take your MP3 library, along with whatever other big multimedia files you have, and make them instantly mobile.

Minds@Work Digital Wallet • $500 • www.mindsatwork.net

200MB of free space (on the partition that contains the Windows System folder). It goes on to say that for the best performance and protection, you should try to allocate more space than that. By default, when Windows installs System Restore on your computer, it allocates about 12 percent of your disk space for storage. So, on a 20GB hard drive, that would be 2.4GB allocated for System Restore. And while this might seem excessive, if the feature means leaving behind the annual ritual of re-installing Windows, then it will be hard-drive space well spent. We'll test this feature to see if System Restore can bring us back from the dead, as part of our full review of WinME next month.

Another noteworthy ME feature is fast-boot, a combination of OS- and hardware-level optimizations to get PCs to boot faster. Microsoft claims that new systems will be able to boot in as little as 30 seconds, though our test machine—a new Intel 820 motherboard with a 1GHz Pentium-III and 128MB of RDRAM—took closer a minute to get to a usable desktop.

Still missing is a built-in control panel for DirectX, although you can run the DXDIAG utility (which lives in the c:\windows\system sub-folder) to see which DirectX drivers are installed. Microsoft has long asserted that DirectX is a part of the operating system, and should be essentially invisible to end-users. But given the havoc past versions have sometimes wrought on gamers, having something in the control panel for troubleshooting DirectX would be useful.

Tune in next month when we'll be shaking Windows ME down in a full review to see how it fares versus Windows 98—both for overall performance and for game compatibility. CGW

THINGS TO COME

The Church of the Blue Light

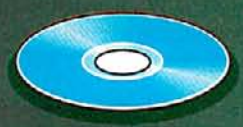
There's a quiet revolution on the horizon for laser-based storage technology like CDs and DVDs, and it's called blue lasers.

DVDs already have the potential to hold a whopping 17GB of information if they use the double-sided, double-density format. Now, imagine being able to quadruple that capacity just by changing the color of the laser used to read the disc.

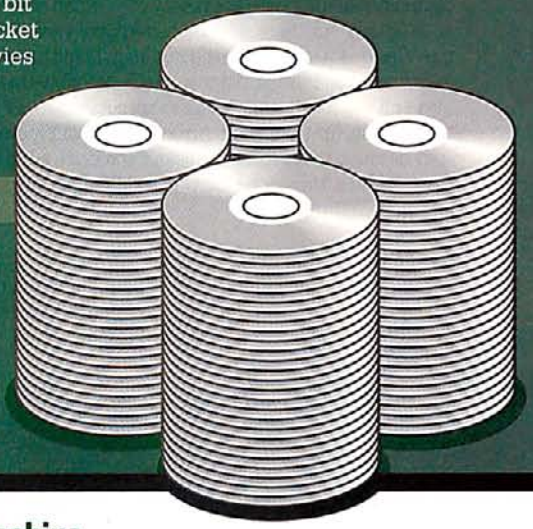
Researchers have figured out that blue light's shorter wavelength allows a blue laser to read a disc with a bit density (how close the pits and peaks are on a disc) four times that of current technology. The result? How does 70GB on a single disc grab you? Yeah, we like the sound of it too. Of course, the first applications of this technology probably won't be for games. So far, very few games have shipped in a DVD version, and only some come on multiple CDs. But this frickin' huge bit bucket could be just the ticket for cramming multiple movies onto a single DVD. You could sit through a triple-feature without ever changing the disc. Or, the next time a game is using a movie license, the game and the movie could come on a single disc. Of course, getting both a good movie and a good game using that license is a more difficult feat, but it's always technology that leads the way before good apps follow.

MEASURING UP

One blue light CD = 7.5 DVDs = 108 conventional CDs









Coming Next Month: The Ultimate Gaming Machine

Every year they gather, all vying for the crown, all battling in the gaming arena to see who will emerge victorious. Many are called, few are chosen. Next month we begin the three-issue odyssey that is *CGW*'s Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup, where we scour the land to find the very best gaming machine to be had. We'll start off with pre-built systems for under $1,700. Then, in January, we'll take on the heavyweights where money is no object, and we'll see if Intel can bring its newest artillery piece to bear, the Pentium-IV.

Then, in February, we'll show you how to build the machine of your dreams in two load-outs: an absolute beast with the best of everything, and an economical system for under $1,700. Sharpen your pencils, save your pennies, ship the kids to Siberia if you have to; next month we're going in, and this time, it's personal.

Under the Hood

BY DAVE SALVATOR



Beyond the Beige Box

Why, after 20 years, does a PC still look like a PC?

When asked in a recent *Newsweek* interview why other companies aren't innovating PC design, Apple CEO Steve Jobs opined, "Most of the people running the companies don't love PCs. Does Steve Ballmer [Microsoft's CEO] love PCs? Does Craig Barrett [Intel's CEO] love PCs? Does Michael Dell love PCs? If he wasn't selling PCs, he'd be selling something else." So Apple has The Love that the rest of the industry lacks, if you believe Jobs. It might also be that Apple needed a way to stand out in the crowded home PC market. For whatever reason, you have to give Apple credit for making bold changes in the design of its products. And though Apple has been at best a fair-weather friend to gamers over the years, Jobs has a point.

For 20 years, the PC industry has been lifting those innovations and grafting them into the PC—the mouse, the graphical user interface (GUI), and peer-to-peer networking, to name a few. And yes, some PC makers have essentially knocked off the iMac design and put a PC in it (iPaq, anyone?). But the question is: Why does an entire industry still follow one company's lead? There are plenty of talented, inspired industrial designers out there, so why haven't we seen a profusion of new designs like those in the automotive industry? There are many reasons, but the biggest one is probably that PC companies still sell most of their PCs to corporations—as in old school, suit-and-tie, gray cubicled, brick-and-mortar-type companies. And because that segment doesn't comprise a big part of Apple's sales, they don't have to worry about fitting their box into that culture.

A Function of Form

You may be saying to yourself, "I put my PC on the floor and I only look at it when I slap a CD in there. What do I care what it looks like?" Good point. But inside a PC lives a hell of a lot of very cool technology—not unlike home-audio gear—so why can't PCs have a look that says, "Hey! There's some serious freakin' hardware in here!"

Some of my gripes with PC design aren't aesthetic. We're now four years into the USB era, and on most PCs, those damned USB ports are still on the back of the machine. Props to Compaq for being the first PC maker to put them on the front panel. Intel's new 850 chipset for the Pentium-IV has two USB root hubs, so a PC maker can now have two ports in back, and bring the other two up to the front; other PC makers will finally be doing this for their fall products. But this should have been as standard as having the floppy drive living on the front-panel.

Why can't PCs have a look that says, 'Hey! There's some serious freakin' hardware in here!'

Of all the things Apple has done in terms of design, the one thing I am waiting for is someone to make a PC case similar to the G3/G4's, where you lift one latch, and the side of the case opens like an oven-door—bringing the motherboard out of the box so it can be worked on easily. This was a truly inspired design, one of those times when you say, "why didn't someone think of that before?" When someone does bring that case to market, assuming they get it right, it will no doubt wind up on one or both of *CGW*'s Killer Rigs component lists.

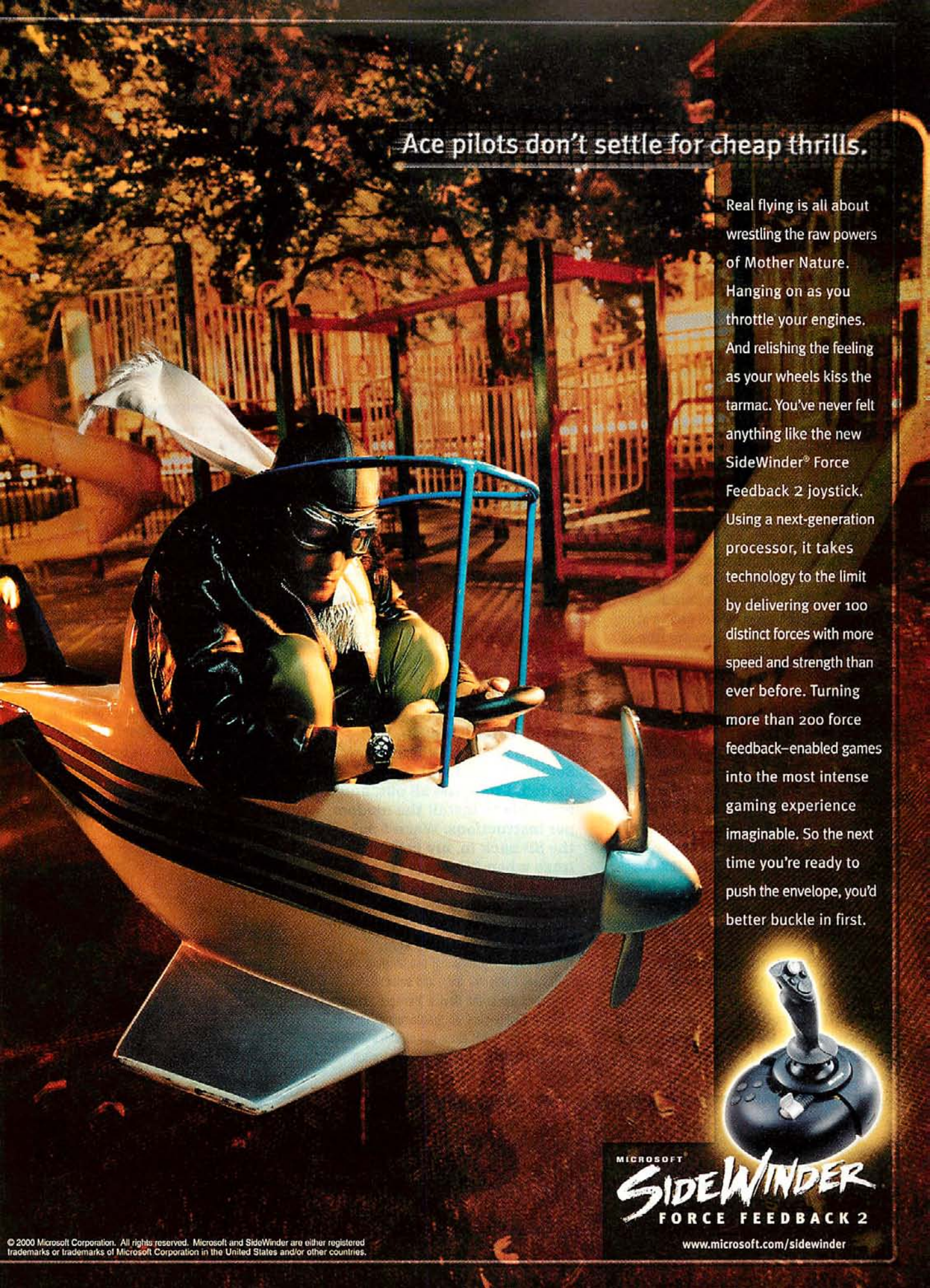
I've seen the new Pentium-IV PCs due this fall, and even Dell—that bastion of beige—is revamping its case design and going for a sleeker look. So it seems that the industry might finally be warming up to the idea of a different look. But the point is, all you PC makers out there, you don't have to wait for Apple to create the next new design. Blaze a trail! Think outside the box (so to speak). Give your PC a look on the outside to match the coolness of the technology inside, or to reflect the personalities of those who are looking for something different.

What do you want your next PC to look like? Let me know at cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com. CGW



DAVE'S MIX

1. CRIMSON SKIES beta
2. COMANCHE VS. HOKUM
3. POCKETCHESS on the Palm
4. Speak No Evil, Wayne Shorter
5. Stick and Rudder, Wolfgang Langewiesche


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Tech Medics



You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medic may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to **cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com**.

The Eternal Question

Should I buy a Pentium-III or Athlon 1GHz now, or wait for the Pentium-IV?

I haven't gotten my mitts on a Pentium-IV yet, so I can't answer that part of the question. The Pentium-IV will have a revamped floating-point unit, and parts of its integer ALUs (arithmetic logic units) are clocked to run at double the speed of the rest of the chip. So it shows promise, on paper anyway. But as for the immediate decision between Athlon and Pentium-III, the performance of these two parts is a virtual deadlock, so the decision turns to price. If you're not hell-bent on having RDRAM — the benefits of which only show up in some rare cases — you could build a solid and pretty affordable Pentium-III-based rig using an Intel 815-based motherboard that uses PC133 SDRAM. But Athlon, at the same clock-speed, is a good bit cheaper (an 850MHz P-III at press time was around $400, whereas an 850MHz Athlon was closer to $250). If you're going to go the Athlon route, I suggest the ASUS A7V, a Socket A board with the Via KT133 chipset that can accept the new Thunderbird Athlon (still called Athlon); the A7V also has AGP 4X and PC133 SDRAM support.

Memory, Explained

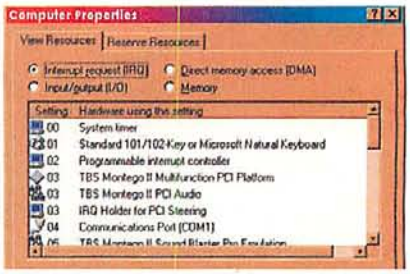
I've been shopping for 128 MB PC800 RDRAM on the Net. I ran across two kinds, ECC and Non-ECC, with ECC being more expensive. I plan on using this RAM with an ASUS P3C-E motherboard. What's the difference between these two memory types, and why is there a price difference?

ECC stands for Error Code Correction. This type of memory has the ability to correct data errors on the fly. ECC memory is generally used in "mission-critical" servers, and the price difference you're seeing is due to the ECC functionality. But ECC has a downside, which is that it can slow memory performance down, so we recommend non-ECC memory, or if your system came with ECC memory preinstalled, to disable ECC in the BIOS.

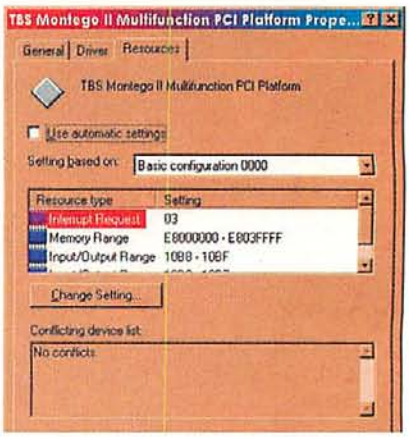
Feeling Conflicted

I recently got a SmartLink 56k PCI V.90 modem from Archtek. I had a lot of trouble installing it; it simply would not install like the instructions said it would. After it was in, I noticed an error when my Sound Blaster Live! drivers loaded. I took the SB out, and I was able to install the modem per instructions. When I put the SB back in, my computer froze when Windows was about to start. Evidently there is some conflict, but how do I find out what it is, and how do I go about resolving it?

To check your I/O resource usage, right-click on the My Computer icon, and select Properties. Go to the Device Manager dialogue tab, and double-click on the Computer icon at the top. Here, you'll get a list of which devices are using which resources. You can switch around between IRQ, DMA, and I/O address settings. The likely culprit is an IRQ conflict, but check the other resources and see what the devices are fighting over.



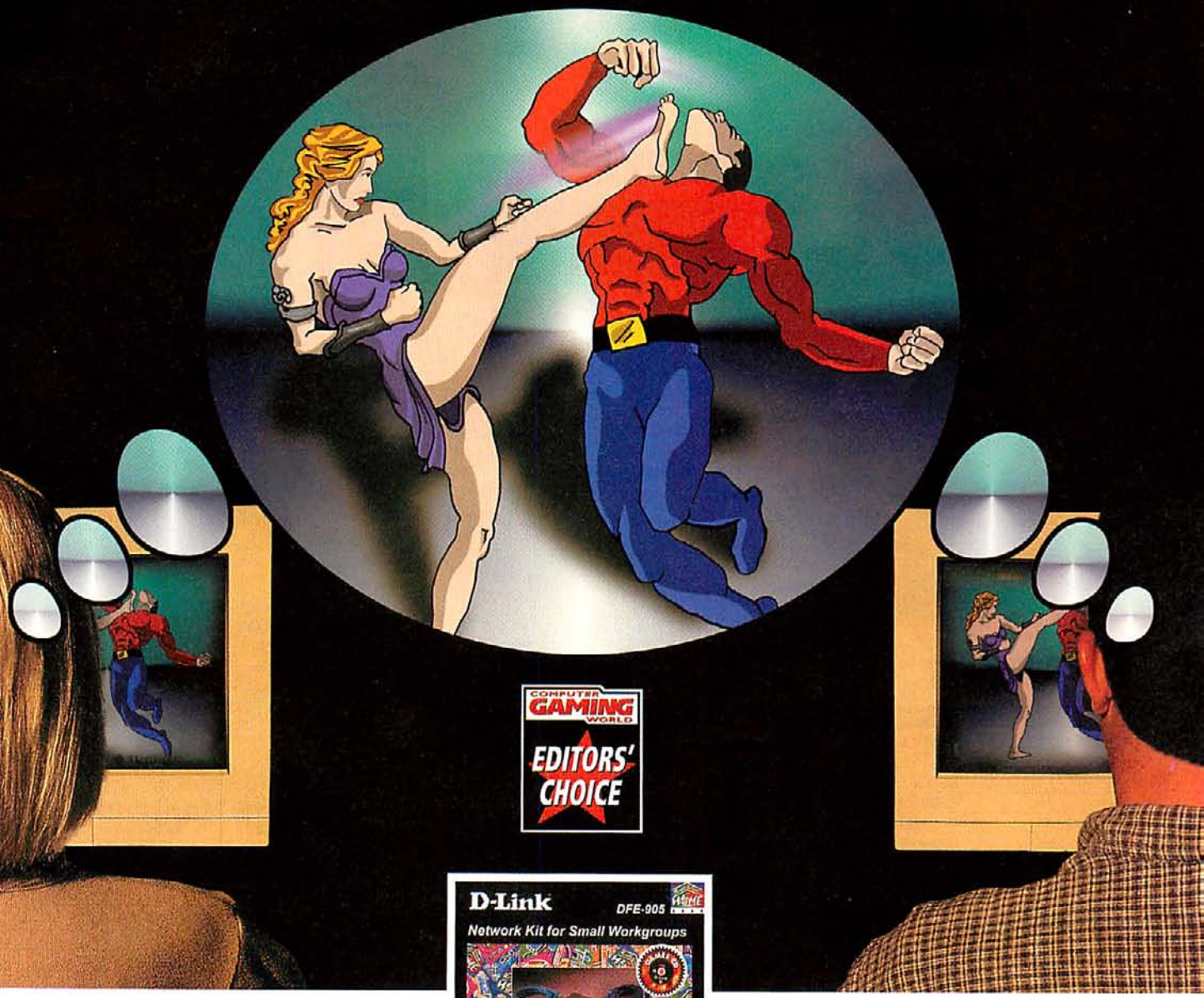
Once you locate the conflict, look at the list and find an available resource (e.g., an unused IRQ). Go back to Device Manager, and select either device and double-click on it. From here, select the Resources dialogue tab, and deselect the "Use Automatic Settings" option. You can now manually assign what I/O resources the device will use. Once the conflict is resolved, the two devices should be happy.



TECHTIP Blame the UPS Guy

If your system occasionally doesn't "see" the video card when you first power up (multiple beeps from the PC speaker), yet it works normally when you do a warm reboot (hitting Ctrl/Alt/Delete) cycle power, it may actually be your uninterruptible power supply (UPS). Some UPSes cycle the battery during startup and don't actually deliver full current. Wait until you get the full "green light" from the UPS before powering up your system. *–Loyd Case*

Gratuitous Violence is 200 Times Faster With a D-Link Network Than With Online Games.



To get the Maximum performance out of a multi-user game, get off the Internet and get on a D-Link 10/100Mb Fast Ethernet Network. Up to 200 times faster than the Internet, and 10 times faster than other legacy networks. Easy to set up and install, a D-Link 10/100 Network In A Box comes with everything you need to build a Windows 95/98 Network.

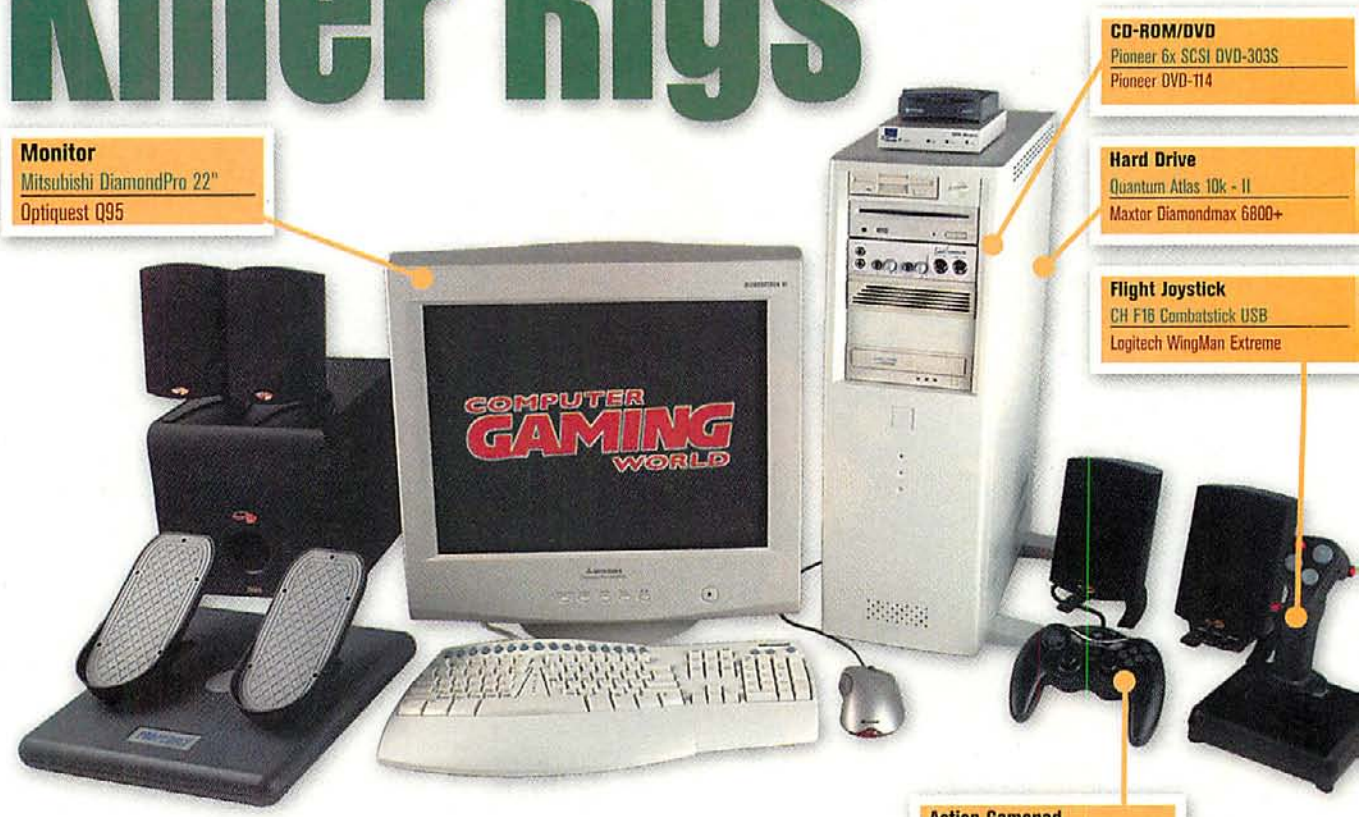
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YOUR TWO BEST RECIPES FOR BUILDING THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

Killer Rigs



Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
YY Minicube case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Motherboard	Asus P3C-E	$180	AGP 4X, Intel 820, RAMBUS
NEW Processor	Intel Pentium-III 1GHz	$1,200	Finally, you can get a Gigahertz
Memory	256MB of PC800 RDRAM	$700	Up from 128MB
Disk Controller	Adaptec 29160	$185	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
Primary Graphics	Hercules 3D Prophet II 64MB	$340	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k - II	$830	Now at 36GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$270	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD-303S	$135	New Pioneer Slot-Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 22" Monitor	$1,150	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$160	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA4800	$175	Loud, clean, uncolored sound
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$40	Reach out and frag someone
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$95	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	Natural in, Newtouch out
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer	$60	No balls!
USB Hub	Logitech WingMan 7-port USB Hub	$79	Get them USB ports upstairs
		Total w/o Game Controllers	$5,646
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like, force-feedback controller
		Total	$5,851

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like www.computershopper.com or www.pricewatch.com. Lists compiled by Dave Salvator.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
NEW Motherboard	ASUS A7V
NEW CPU	Athlon 750 w/ cooling fan
Memory	128MB PC133 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics	Hercules 3D Prophet
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Maxtor Diamondmax 6800 Plus 10.2GB drive
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Value
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
NEW Case	Antec Gemstone
Power Supply	Antec 300W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech WingMan Extreme Digital

KILLER RIGS IN A BOX

Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well, and will put you into the fray without your ever having to charge up the electric screwdriver.



Power Rig

Alienware's Area 51 Aurora took no prisoners in our recent testing, and its latest AMD Athlon-based rig pushes the CPU speed up to 1GHz. The Aurora is also packing 256MB of PC133 SDRAM system memory, along with a GeForce 2 GTS-based 3D card with 64MB of DDR SDRAM, and Klipsch's testicular four-channel ProMedia V.2-400 speakers. And, this rig's all-black components give it a menacing look to match its performance.

Alienware's Area 51 Aurora ■ $3,387 as configured ■ www.alienware.com

Lean Machine

Falcon Northwest built its reputation on gaming rigs from the "bat out of hell" school. But Falcon's new line of value-minded systems will serve the budget-challenged as well. Dubbed Talon, these boxes can be custom-ordered, but the $1,749 stock load-out includes an Athlon 700MHz CPU, 128MB of PC100 SDRAM, a Hercules Prophet 3D graphics card, Sound Blaster Live Value, and a 10GB hard drive. With a 17" monitor and Cambridge's PC Works speakers, this box delivers a lot of punch for the price.



Falcon Northwest's Talon ■ $1,749 as configured ■ www.falcon-nw.com

PENTIUM-IV IN THE WINGS, AND THRUSTMASTER MAKES A COMEBACK

At press time, Intel was preparing its autumn assault on AMD's Athlon beachhead with the new Pentium-IV, Intel's first major architectural overhaul since the original Pentium Pro was introduced five years ago. As of late, AMD has continued its unabated push to find homes in gamers' systems, and has become a force to be reckoned with. A 1GHz Athlon is now $600, which is about half the price of the same-clocked Pentium-III.

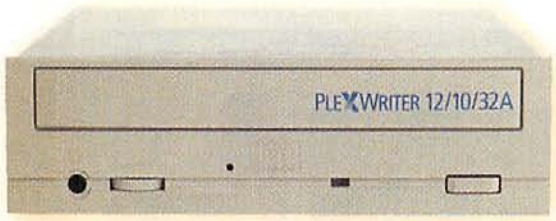
Meanwhile, for all you hardcore flyboys lamenting the passing of Thrustmaster's excellent F22/TQS joystick/throttle combination, lament no more. Thrustmaster has announced that it's bringing this vaunted duo out of mothballs and giving it a serious facelift, including USB functionality and programming software that doesn't require a Ph.D. to use it. The stick will be an exact replica of the F16 Block 50 control stick, and the pedals will also switch to USB. The products will be called the F22 2000 and the TQS 2000, and are scheduled to launch this year.

Price	The Skinny
$150	Solid, stable socket; an Athlon motherboard
$180	Enter the Thunderbird
$130	128MB, squeezed in
$0	It's in there
$130	Solid GeForce SDRAM card
$20	Still gotta have it
$130	Fast and cheap
$155	Slot-drive DVD
$300	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$35	R.I.P. Aureal
$60	Best sub-$100 speakers, period.
$70	Solid performance, good price
$100	In black, of course
$49	Drunk with power
$24	Cheap; nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$39	Very solid 3D joystick with USB
Total	**$1,698**

WHICH 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you: For a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or a PCI motherboard (no AGP), or a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, get 3dfx's Voodoo 5 5500 PCI board. At around $280, the V5 5500 delivers solid performance and has very good FSAA compatibility. And when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo 5 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card. For motherboards with AGP, we recommend Hercules' 3D Prophet II Ultra, based on nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS Ultra chipset. With 64MB of DDR SDRAM, this board will blast games at 1600x1200 – if your monitor can handle it. If its $500 price tag is too much for you, get Hercules' 3D Prophet II, using the GeForce 2 GTS chipset; the 32MB version runs just under $300.

Reviews







photos by Hayden Houser/ DIGITAL CLARITY

PLEXWRITER 12/10/32

Requirements: Open 5 1/4" drive bay, free EIDE connection.
Price: $279
Manufacturer: Plextor
Contact: www.plextor.com

The PlexWriter 12/10/32 is an absolute fireball when it comes to writing discs, much like HP's recently reviewed 9310i. And while the two suffer the same media problems (the drive writes too fast for some CD-R media to keep up with), the extra speed can cut your disc-writing time down to around two minutes. But all this speed seems to come at the cost of reliability. Although it never actually refused to read a disc, it did have many errors trying to read data from CDs. When it does read correctly, it doesn't feel like it's as fast as it claims, and feels slower than the HP 9310i – which is rated at the same 32X speed (12/10/32 means 12x writing, 10x rewriting, and 32x reading).



If you want the fastest thing on the block, this is it. Just be sure you have another drive to do your day-to-day CD-ROM reading activities. –*Alex Handy*

SAITEK CYBORG 3D USB GOLD

Requirements: DirectX 7.0a, a free USB port, Windows 98.
Price: $69
Manufacturer: Saitek
Contact: www.saitekusa.com

Saitek makes some great products. Its X-36 USB flight system is a model of good design, and its GM-2 mouse/controller combo kicks butt in tactical combat sims. Saitek's new Cyborg 3D USB Gold is a solid stick at an affordable price, but it fails to beat Logitech's WingMan Digital Extreme 3D for sheer comfort over long-term use.



The Cyborg 3D installs painlessly via USB, and it runs using Windows' standard USB HID (human interface device) driver, or you can install its own driver. This allows you to use Saitek's Gaming Extensions software to program all of the buttons. The Cyborg's throttle gives you a better sense of how much throttle you're using than the Logitech, but I still prefer the WingMan Digital Extreme in all other aspects. –*Dave Salvator*

MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER GAME VOICE

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 64MB RAM.
Price: $50
Manufacturer: Microsoft
Contact: www.gamevoice.com

The new SideWinder Game Voice is Microsoft's foray into voice-command gaming and voice-to-voice chat over the Internet. Other contestants in this field have included Game Commander and Roger Wilco, but Game Voice seeks to combine the functionality of both of these products – voice-over-Internet and voice-command recognition – into a single, slickly designed package. The eight-button controller that allows you to toggle between giving game commands or talking to others is what separates this package from the rest.

The unit is well designed, but the question is, where do you put it? If you're playing a shooter like UNREAL TOURNAMENT, you can't just lift your hands from the mouse or keyboard to fiddle with the Game Voice – unless you have a death wish. Considering that the point of giving voice commands is to relieve extraneous keyboard searching, the voice controller just seems to complicate things.



The headset also leaves much to be desired. The sound quality is poor, and a loose wire running from the mic to the earphones is a snag hazard. You also have to ask, do I really want to look like some dorky Time-Life operator?

If you want to get into in-game voice commands and voice-over-Internet technologies, buy yourself a decent headset, hook Game Commander MX up with Roger Wilco, and let the good times roll. Or, you could try growing a third hand. –*Tom Price*

I don't know really how to say this, but I had a few doubts about the buzz on your new RADEON™ gamer boards. I checked out your so-called RADEON™ GPU with its integrated T&L acceleration and ultra-fast DDR to speed up my Quake™ III Arena framerates. Not only does RADEON™ have awesome high-quality performance but it supports more advanced 3D games and upcoming DirectX™ 8.0 features than any other graphics board. The DVD playback feature will come in handy when I need to take a break from gaming. And, I have to admit the video capture and TV-output option on RADEON™ 64MB DDR makes it a must-have. But, just remember, the only opinion of RADEON™ that matters is mine and I have only one thing to say to you ATI

NOW SHIPPING!

ATi RADEON 64MB DDR

Gimme Radeon!



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ATi

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Age of Empires II: The Conquerors

Civilization Horoscopes: Your Astrological Forecast for the 4th Through the 15th Centuries by Tom Chick

AZTECS
(see Meso-Americans)



BRITONS
Mayan rising eclipses the reputation of your archers. To makes matters worse, your Longbowmen refuse to wear Thumb Rings. Treat yourself to Yeomen later in the game to make up for it. The sun will never set on your empire. By "never," we mean "not until the 20th century."



BYZANTINES
No more Monks healing units faster than the enemy can damage them, but at least your Cataphracts rule the battlefield now more than ever. Make your life less complicated, but consider renaming Constantinople again.

CELTS
You will not get along with your neighbors, so be thankful for your trusty siege engines. Scorpions do more damage and can attack multiple targets, so you are poised to keep the party crashers away from the gates.

CHINESE
Sadly, you will no longer be known as the "rush civ," a title that now goes to the Huns. Buck up and enjoy your advantage with THE CONQUERORS' new super Scorpions. Take time out to make a pretty vase, found a dynasty, or flirt with Communism.



FRANKS
Conquer France early and often.



GOTHS
Win the early race to the Castle Age by hunting boars. Since your Hunters now carry more meat, you won't have to micromanage hunting by luring boars to your Town Center. Your ability to quickly spit out hordes of infantry just got better with Perfusion and Anarchy. Get some sun.

HUNS
The fact that you can't build a house contributes to your general feeling of restlessness. Take advantage of this freedom by traveling to new places, seeing the sights, and then plundering them. Don't despair if everyone else seems to hate you.



JAPANESE
Now that your Samurai are faster and better armored, you will see increased job performance. Enjoy a nice sushi meal, courtesy of your expert fishermen.

KOREANS
Your wonderful Towers make a great addition to any base, while your armored Turtle Ships and War Wagons keep you safe away from home. Japan and China play a prominent role.

MAYANS
(see Meso-Americans)

MESO-AMERICANS
You are without cavalry, but don't let it get you down – now that all infantry have inherent piercing armor, it's a little easier to rush those archers who try to ruin your day. Your Eagle Warriors have longer lines of sight than the faster Scout Cavalry of your opponents, so they make great mobile outposts. Unfortunately, there are no gunpowder units or Imperial Age infantry upgrades in your future. Mayans: Laugh this off with your superior bows and long-term resource investments. Aztecs: Take comfort that there's no better way to mow down enemy infantry than with post-Garland War Elite Jaguar Warriors. Be careful not to mistake Spaniards on horseback for gods.

MONGOLS
Now that your Light Cavalry have an Imperial Age advance, use more cavalry to get your way.

PERSIANS
Slow War Elephants got you down? Mahout them and win the day.

SARACENS
You will receive visitors who won't leave.

SPANISH
Spend your money at the Monastery. Tend to spiritual matters personally with your mule-mounted Missionaries, a powerful part of any balanced army. Your Conquistadors, as the fastest hard-hitting units in the game, will serve you well if you manually keep them out of range of counterattacks. If micromanaged properly, circumstances will turn in your favor. Expect the Inquisition.



TEUTONS
You might be unhappy that now you have to play fair and square instead of building Town Centers everywhere, but at least no one will hate you anymore. Consider dropping the extraneous "e" from your name.



TURKS
Your Janissaries are more powerful to keep Conquistadors from stealing their thunder. Unlucky number: 182.



VIKINGS
You will discover a continent but not get credit for it. CGW

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comanche vs. Hokum

Survival Tips for the Virtual Rotorhead by Jeff Lackey

■■■ ENEMY ENGAGED: RAH 64 COMANCHE VERSUS KA-52 HOKUM (EECH) is one of the most engrossing flight sims to hit the shelves in years. However, the features that result in unprecedented immersion – a fully dynamic campaign, complex missions, and a myriad of decisions – also result in a potential for bewilderment. Here are a few tips that may increase your medal count, or at least your survival rate.

Double Your Pleasure...

Before you install EECH, go to www.razorworks.com and download the chapters that were inadvertently left out of the U.S. version's manual. While you're there, pick up the latest patch which, unlike some sim patches that fix serious bugs, is primarily composed of feature enhancements (many the result of user suggestions).

Next, pick up a copy of EECH's older brother, ENEMY ENGAGED: APACHE VERSUS HAVOC. You can find it for about $9 most places. Install it, and then update it with the patch on your EECH CD. Next, make sure you run it at least once, to set up its graphic files. Now, when you install EECH, it will integrate its predecessor and you will have doubled the number of flyable choppers and campaigns.

Staying Alive

If this is your first chopper sim, remember that the name of the game is stealth. Fly as low as you can, and use the terrain to stay out of the sight of the bad guys until you are ready to fire. A great example of this approach is the way that veteran EECH pilots a target surrounded by SAM sites. Find some masking terrain, such as a hill or mountain. Snuggle up close behind it, then set your ground radar to high priority mode, forcing it to select only anti-air targets. Select your smart missiles, such as Hellfires, then slowly bob up until you acquire the SAM sites. Fire a volley of missiles in LOBL mode (LOAL mode will not allow missiles to redirect to targets out of the line of sight) and quickly drop back down behind the masking terrain. The SAM sites will be taken out while you're hiding. Repeat until the defenders are depleted, and then attack your primary target with impunity.

Also, don't forget to use all of your assets. An artillery strike or air support, if assets are available, can transform hunters into prey. However, don't forget that that helpless enemy column you caught in the open knows how to radio for help, too! So don't hang around too long, or you'll find an enemy fast mover eating you for a morning snack.

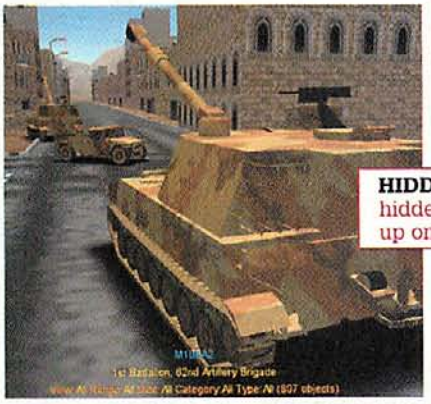
But Wait! There's more!

There's a wonderful strategy guide on your game CD that can give you enough tips to get started. The best thing about EECH is that its complex, dynamic gameworld allows for an endless variation in strategy and tactics! CGW

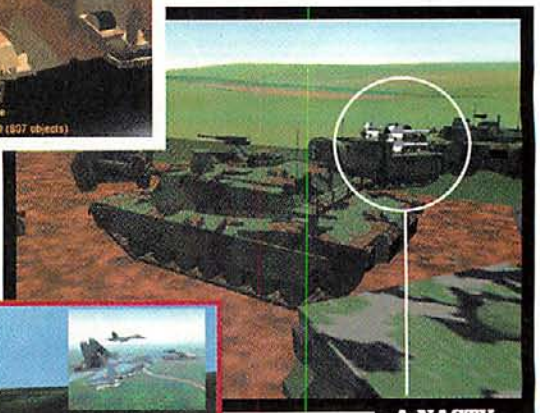
KEEPING TRIM



■■■ Flying a chopper in combat can sometimes seem overwhelming. EECH provides a control aid that is also realistic in that it is available in the real helicopters. This is the trim control, and most people ignore it because they don't understand how it works. The trim in EECH is not analogous to that in fixed wing fighters. This control sets the "release" location of your cyclic (joystick). In other words, if you're pushing the joystick forward to maintain a forward speed, and you press the trim control, you can release the cyclic to the neutral position and it will maintain the forward position it was in when you pushed the button. You still have full control of the cyclic – i.e., it's not an autopilot – but you'll find it much easier to maintain a constant forward speed and altitude. You can use this trim control for everything from maintaining a constant forward speed to simplifying reaching a quick halt/hover.



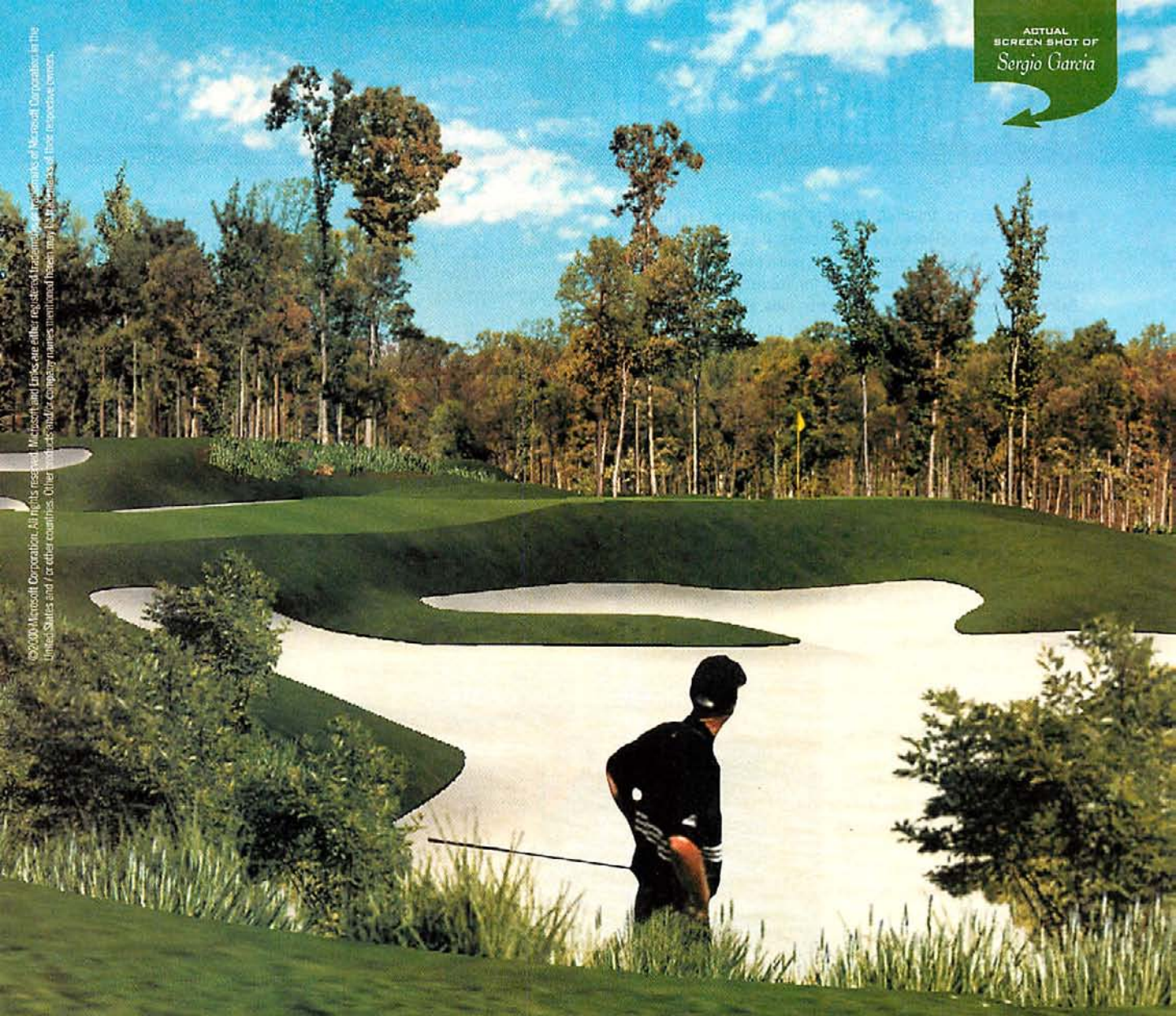
HIDDEN DANGERS Enemy forces hidden in city streets often don't show up on radar—until too late.





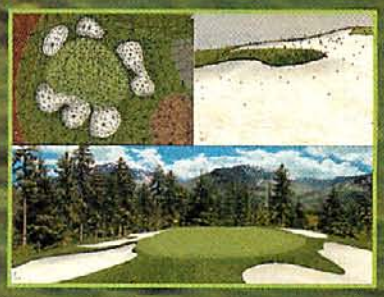
REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE ALT-F12 will show every unit's current target, such as the Russian fighters on this SAM's radar screen.

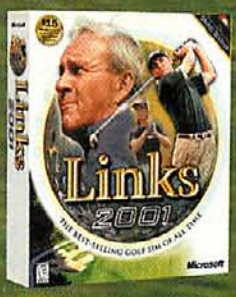
A NASTY SURPRISE Anti-aircraft weapons are often hidden in the middle of an armored column.



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E
EVERYONE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Zone.com

MICROSOFT.COM/GAMES/LINKS2001

Microsoft

Icewind Dale

Scale the Spine of the World With an Efficient Party by Thierry Nguyen

■■■ Success in ICEWIND DALE is all about a carefully constructed, well-balanced party of heroes. If you haphazardly throw some dwarves and elves together, you'll soon find yourself pouring money into Temple coffers for resurrection services. Before making your first (or next) party, look at these suggestions. They could save you much grief later on in the game.

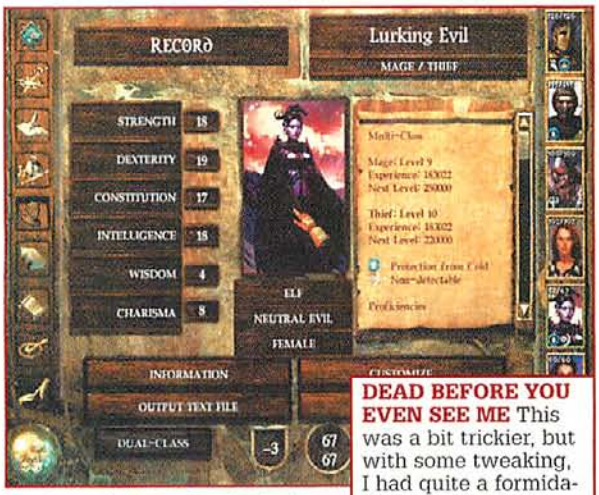
Three's the Ticket

Whatever you decide for your party makeup, three attributes matter the most: Dexterity, Constitution, and your character's "prime attribute"; these three attributes should ideally be 18 or higher. Balancing your attributes is nice and all, but you're better off having some stats in the low single-digits in order to buff up these all-important three. Dexterity is crucial because the whole world will be swinging all manner of nasty weapons at you, and it's always better to have a dodging bonus. Constitution determines how many hitpoints you get per level, so a high constitution translates into being able to soak more damage, no matter who you are.



BIG LOVABLE BRUTE Fighters need only Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity. As long as he sticks to pounding skulls, he doesn't need any brains.

For Fighter characters, the prime attribute is usually Strength; you'll need it for them to use some of the more powerful items in the game. You can safely sacrifice attributes such as Intelligence or Charisma to pump up the main three. Rangers should have decent Wisdom, since they become pseudo-clerics down the line. Paladins are required to have a high Charisma, so knock down either Wisdom or Intelligence to beef up your main attributes.

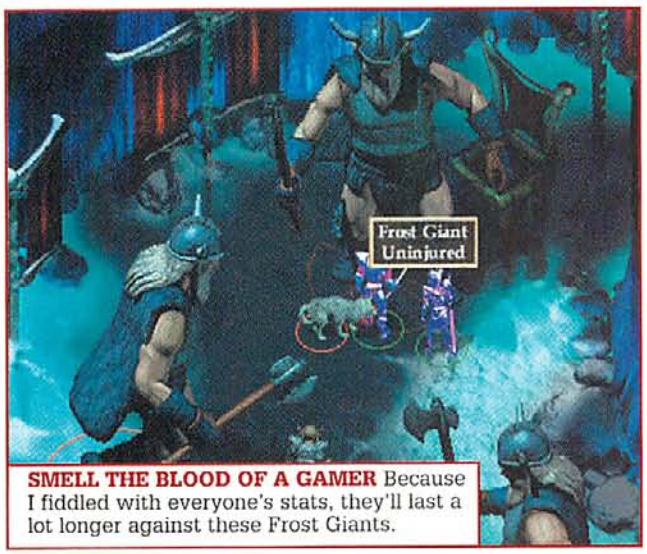


DEAD BEFORE YOU EVEN SEE ME This was a bit trickier, but with some tweaking, I had quite a formidable mage/thief. She can dish out damage, dodge most blows, and is smart enough to cast spells, to boot.

The Priest's prime attribute is Wisdom. Clerics have a slightly easier time, as they don't have the Druid's Charisma requirement. If you're making a Druid, slash off Intelligence or Strength to make up for the required Charisma. If you have to choose between lowering just Intelligence or Strength, go for Intelligence, since a decent Strength is often needed to wield some of the better druid/cleric-only items.

Mages are the most straightforward: Intelligence. You generally don't need a charismatic, nor a wise Mage. Most of the time, your Mage will be in the back, so Strength isn't really needed either (though, it doesn't hurt). If you're going to pick a Specialist Mage, opt for either Illusionist or Necromancer, as the only opposing schools are each other, which is perfectly fine. The other Specialists have either too many opposing schools, or they oppose schools with really useful spells.

The Thieves are the trickiest classes to create. Treat them as Fighters, but make sure they have the highest Dexterity possible. Since they will serve as Scouts and monster baiters, they *will* have to fight. Also, pour all your skill points into Stealth at first. Later on, when you start finding Stealth-enhancing equipment, develop Find Traps (the dungeon designers went a bit crazy with traps) and Open Locks. Pickpocket isn't really worth it, as you'll be making a ton of money by selling surplus +2 equipment. Bards are the trickiest; for them, lay off Strength, knock down Wisdom, and beef up Charisma and Intelligence in addition to Dexterity and Constitution.



SMELL THE BLOOD OF A GAMER Because I fiddled with everyone's stats, they'll last a lot longer against these Frost Giants.

A Touch, or Two, of Class

If you plan on multi- or dual-classing, you're on your own. Either way, you'll need to make some hard choices about how to have good Attributes for your current/future classes. A couple of suggestions that weren't too hard to create, and became really useful: a multi-class Mage/Thief, and a dual-classed Fighter/Cleric.

If you take the proper time to tweak your attributes, you'll thank yourself when you see your fighters having 100+ hitpoints at level seven, or mages who can take more than one hit per battle. Now go on and turn your level-one weaklings into master demon-slayers. CGW



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RP

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CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com (please put CGTIPS in the subject line). We'll publish one submission each month. Please do not simply cut and paste cheat codes from the Web. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the Computer Gaming World BozoBin!

READER TIP

Diablo II

■■■ I just finished reading your magazine's guide to DIABLO 2, and the guide made the Amazon seem completely dependent on the bow. I think the Amazon is an excellent melee fighter because my character just turned level 25 and deals up to 150 damage with a pike. While the pike has a very slow attack speed, the Amazon's jab attack gets around that. So my character can deal 3x150 in under one second, translating into 450 damage! Add the 33% chance of critical strike (if your character has that skill upgraded enough) for a grand total of 600 damage in one second. Nothing stands a chance, including other characters in duels.
–Jon Wagner

For refuting our DIABLO 2 guide, we're giving Jon a copy of TZAR: BURDEN OF THE CROWN, a SANITY t-shirt, and a Klingon Communicator trinket. Enjoy!



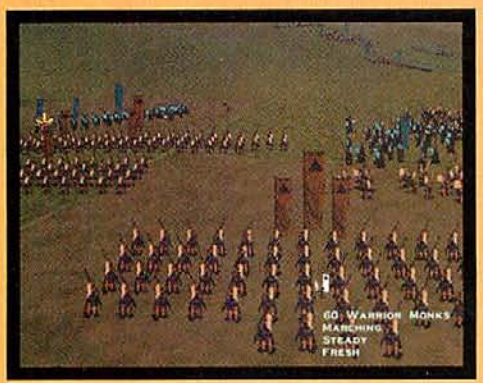




Evolva

■■■ If you find yourself constantly being overrun by swarms of beasties, here are some ways to "thin the herd." Although it may seem obvious, make sure to use the terrain to your advantage. Not only can you often avoid damage by taking the high ground, you can also lure the aliens into withering ambushes at choke points. If you need to avoid combat completely, get the crawlies to chase you onto the slippery green surfaces that are usually located near cliffs. While you can use your "sticky-feet" or jumping ability to stay alive, the aliens will slide helplessly to their doom.

Shogun: Total War



■■■ Sure, it's a lot of fun watching your cavalry sweeping down a hillside or seeing gouts of smoke rising from your columns of Musketeers. But the core of any good army in SHOGUN is Warrior Monks and Archers, who are the most versatile and useful units in the game. Train them early, often, and at every opportunity. Warrior Monks are the best balance of speed, offense, and defense. They can scare away low-honor Buddhist units without even coming to blows. Unlike gunpowder units, Archers aren't hobbled in the rain, they have greater accuracy and range, they don't require a direct line-of-sight to their target, and you won't have to wait for any foreigners to show up before you can train them. By the time you can start training Arquebusiers and Musketeers, you should already have several high-honor Archers for your long-range needs. Remember that other units have their place, but your bread and butter should be Warrior Monks and Archers.

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CGW TIPS

DARK REIGN 2

■■■ Use the mine-detecting units. Use them. Use them. Use them. In the later stages of the single-player missions, the Sprawlers use them religiously. You're going to steadily lose your forces to parasite bombs unless you meticulously scour areas. The best way to accomplish this is to group your units into two squadrons. One should be composed of four to six infantry and a mine-detecting unit. The other squadron should be the bulk of your forces. Use the smaller group to scout ahead of the second force. Unfortunately, you'll have to micromanage this element of the game.



EVERQUEST: RUINS OF KUNARK

■■■ One of the hardest things to do in EVERQUEST is to earn money in short order. Enter trade skills. By learning a trade, such as pottery or brewing, you can easily make bundles of cash as your skill level increases. It's not unheard of to earn 10 or 20 platinum from making pots and beer, then selling them to local merchants. One word of advice, however: You'll want to be at around level 9 before you start trying to become a craftsman or craftswoman.



ICEWIND DALE

■■■ Here're some combat tactics for a standard party consisting of two fighters, two priests, one mage, and one mage/thief.

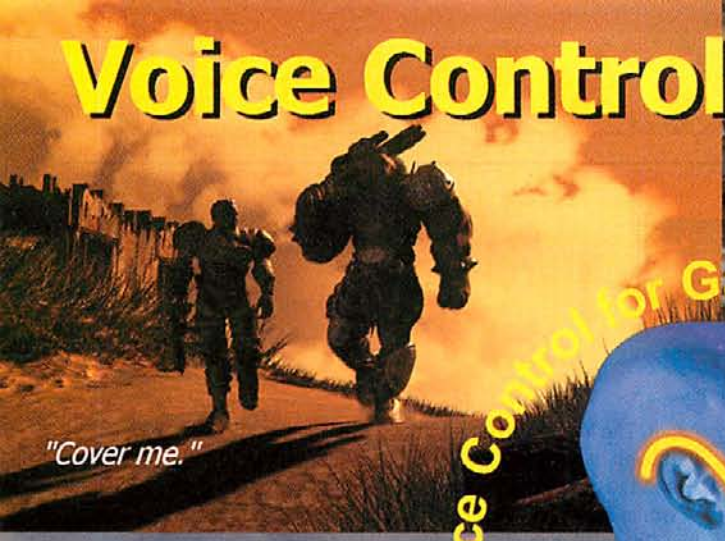
The mage/thief scouts ahead with stealth, and scopes out the opposition. If there is one defined leader, backstab it. Otherwise, open with an area effect spell, and retreat back to the party. The rest of the party will initially be using ranged weapons on the incoming enemies.

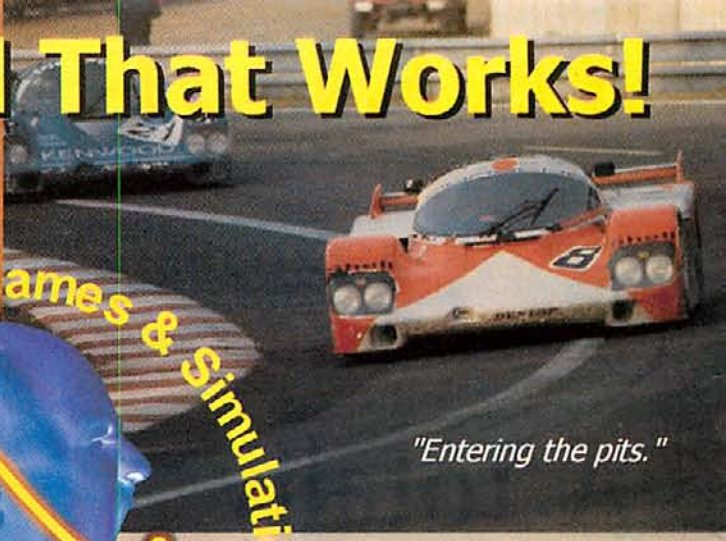
As the enemies close in, the fighters switch to melee and rush forward. They will dish out and soak most of the damage, and maintain distance between the party and the enemies. The priests then focus on healing, using their slings, or casting a support spell or two. Finally, the mages sit in the back and either pelt the enemies with area-effect spells, or surgically target important enemies. The mages must be protected; the priests serve as a buffer between the mages and the combat, and the mage/thief in particular plays bodyguard to the mage.

This strategy works well in taking down anything from hordes of cold wights, to fire giants, to Yxunomei herself.



Voice Control That Works!

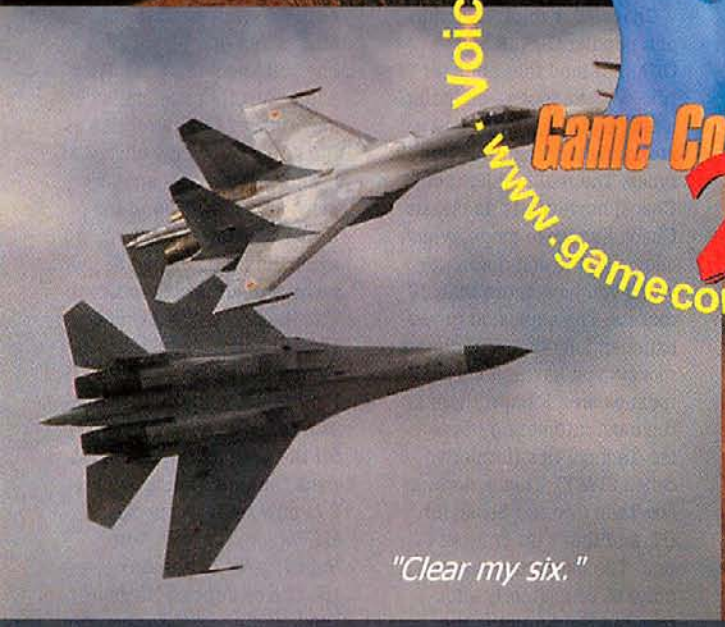




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- ZDNET GameSpot

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- Computer Gaming World

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"A real winner"
- Flightsim.com

"Superb recognition"
- GameVisions.com

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MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

A Totally UNREAL Year

GAME OF THE YEAR PACKS A MIGHTY HAUL OF UT BOOTY

Capping off a fine year of UT-mania will be UNREAL TOURNAMENT GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION, wrapped and ready for the holiday season. Aside from offering the latest version of the game, this release jams in the UT Bonus Pack, Inoxx Map Pack, and some extra maps like Hall of Giants from Digital Extremes, co-developer of UNREAL. Three of the better Net mods are also being included: Rocket Arena, ChaosUT, and Tactical Ops. Rocket Arena features a slick fight-to-the-death format set amidst a tight, tiered level. Spectators can watch these one-on-one brawls from a variety of perspectives as they wait for their chance to take a piece out of the winner. The levels are quite nice, though deliberately small, and the gladiatorial format works surprisingly well.

ChaosUT is the UT version of a popular QUAKE and QUAKE II mod that adds terrific new weapons—including a nasty-looking sword and a crossbow with multiple bolt types. The real highlight of Chaos, however, is its classic Chaos Kamikaze mode, which allows you to self-detonate when you have more than 10 rockets. The explosion grows exponentially bigger the more rockets you have—it's a real room-clearer. Finally, there is the most interesting of the lot: Tactical Ops (formerly called SWAT). This is nothing less than Counter-Strike for UT, and that's no exaggeration. The maps may not be quite as consistently effective, but the format is the same: strike force versus terrorist, money to buy weapons and upgrades, and realistic victory parameters. Weapon modeling is almost as strong as in CS, with good recoil effects and graphics. This is one you shouldn't miss. With a little further tweaking, it may replace Counter-Strike as the strike-force mod of choice.

The two massive enhancement packs bundled in the Game Of The Year Edition are available for download at **www.unrealtournament.com.** The Inoxx Map Pack collects six maps from master level designer Cédric "Inoxx" Fiorentino, who did the Terraniux and Extreme levels for the original UNREAL. This pack contains Facing Worlds 2 (a new take on the classic CTF level); the vast Kosov Valley; a set of tiered concentric circles dubbed Nucleus; the low-grav SpacNoxx; and a pair of amazing, vertigo-inducing levels set on a vast skyscraper under construction. These are outstanding multiplayer maps with plenty of hidey-holes, multiple levels, and ramps.

Prior to the Inoxx release, Epic gave fans another set of free enhancements, dubbed the UT Bonus Pack. In addition to four new skins, there are eleven CTF and DM maps of varying quality. While Arcane Temple is a moody DM map and Hydro16 a good, intricate CTF map

STRIKING BACK Tactical Ops is UNREAL TOURNAMENT's answer to Counter-Strike, and in several areas, it's even better than CS.



No Mo' SIMMARS page 192
Writing the Action page 193
All We Are Saying Is Give SIMS a Chance page 194
STARFLIGHT Rides Again page 196



RIDE MY ROCKET Rocket Arena is mano-a-mano pit combat with an audience of eager fraggers waiting for their turn to demolish the winner of each match.

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

for large groups, some other offerings—such as Cliff Blezinski's own Shrapnel][—are a bit wanting. The bonus pack also adds "relics," powerups which respawn and move within the level if left untouched. The relics are Strength, Regeneration, Defense, Speed, Redemption (brings you back to life once), and Vengeance (explodes upon your death with a large killing radius). This summer also saw the release of the 425 patch for UT, which improved several areas of password-protected sessions, made numerous enhancements to the editor, and generally smoothed out the code.

Sure, the Game Of The Year Edition is a box full of stuff available free on the Net. Anyone seriously into UT should look these items up and download them. But it's a solid bundle for the Wal-Mart crowd, and will help further spread the good word of the best online action game around.

If you want to forgo the expense, check out PlanetUnreal for links to all this gear and more. While there, make sure you download the CorpseMania mod. I'll let you discover the joys of this demented little gem for yourself. Just set it to ZombieBeatDown, crank up the AI zombie count, and aim for the brain. CGW

TOM'S MIX

1. COMBAT MISSION
2. UNREAL TOURNAMENT CTF
3. METAL FATIGUE
4. VIRTUA TENNIS
5. Alice Cooper's Brutal Planet

Are We Obsessed Yet?

The ULTIMA ONLINE Convention

In college I worked the dealer's room at Creation Conventions. You know: those sci-fi media cons that drew guests like George Takei, Bill Mumy, and Robby the Robot. These were the ultimate grazing grounds for geekdom, but I think they may have a challenger in the Ultima Online World Faire, being held this November in Austin, Texas.

Even though I've rarely spent $2,500 on imaginary online real-estate, I like ULTIMA ONLINE as much as the next person who doesn't make it his life's consuming passion and actually breathes air outside the basement now and again. But imagine, if you will, someone so enthralled by UO that they buy plane tickets to Texas, get a hotel room ($175 a night), and spend $125 to $200 in registration fees (no UO gold accepted) to sit around for a weekend soaking up the B.O. of the hairy dude in the next seat and listening to panels such as "The Quest for Game Balance: How Do We Get There?," "Animal Taming," and "Notoriety and Player Self-Moderation: A Discussion of Tools." It's EST through the looking glass. It makes one long to hear William Shatner talk about horse-breeding for an hour while fervent fans wave their hands in the air and try to get him to talk about The Tholian Web.

Actually, the Faire (and I defy Origin to find that spelling in ye olde dictionary) might be a ripping good time if the FAQ at the Web site (**www.uo.com/faire**) is any indication. For example:

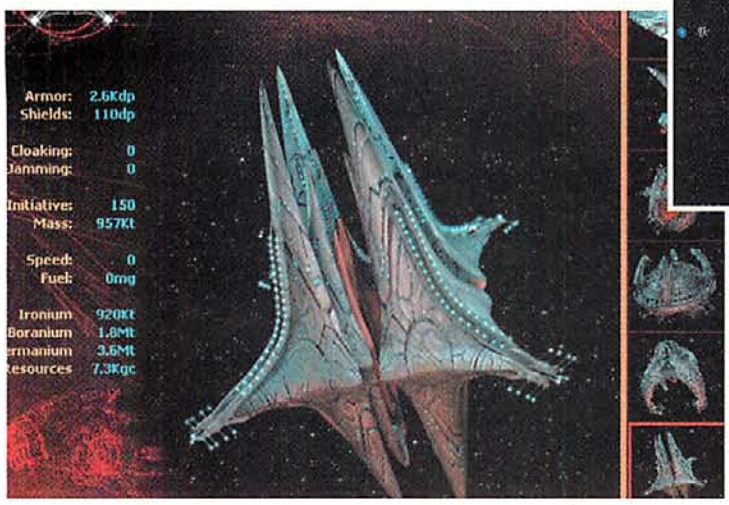
Q: Can I bring medieval weapons such as swords or slings?

A: Yes. If you plan on attending in costume, you may bring medieval weaponry. However, certain policies do apply, and you will be subject to any local ordinances.

Since this is Texas – a state with a concealed carry law – I can't imagine what weapons might be barred under local ordinances, but I'd love to find out. The rules do clarify this further: Swords, maces, clubs, and daggers are allowed at the con. The party poopers at Origin, however, have to get all nanny-like in their policy statement: "Do NOT allow any weapon to be handled by children, do NOT use any weapon in a threatening or dangerous manner, do NOT swing your weapon around." Why bring a hand-tooled spiked club to a party if you can't let your ten-year-old swing it in a dangerous manner? I also imagine that these local ordinances would frown on actual Player Killing at the con, so you anti-social PKs should stay home. The FAQ says nothing of spell-casting, blacksmithing, or the ever-popular bowyery, so have at it in the Austin Convention Center lobby.

Of course, I mock what I don't understand, largely because I know good material when I see it. I'm sure UO fans will have a grand old time meeting in real life, and putting a face to Thwarfnor the Ugly, who they met on the quest for the golden poontang. It's also further proof that all the smart people in the gaming industry are in Origin's marketing department.

BY ROBERT COFFEY robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com







ROBERT'S MIX

1. Diablo II
2. Dark Reign 2
3. The Old 97s
4. George Lucas in Love at www.mediatrip.com
5. Deus Ex

To Infinity and Beyond!

SPACING OUT WITH 4X SPACE GAMES IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Long a staple of the PC gaming industry, the sprawling 4X (Explore, Exploit, Expand, Exterminate) space-colonization opus has been conspicuously absent on the recent strategy-gaming landscape. Until now. We've already seen the release of IMPERIUM GALACTICA II, and before year's end (provided everyone sticks to schedule) we should see STARS! SUPERNOVA, SPACE EMPIRES IV, and REACH FOR THE STARS! What do these games have in common besides superfluous exclamation marks? They're tried-and-true, head-to-toe traditional turn-based interstellar empire-builders, stressing management of multiple layers of strategy. And they're also all a little too easily dismissed as "overly wonky" by gamers intoxicated by fast-paced RTS action. Don't make that mistake—all of these games have something to offer gamers who are up for a challenge.

SPACE EMPIRES IV is a perfect example of the entire genre. The first game was a one-man creation released as shareware in 1993. Since then, little Malfador Machinations has plugged away on its original design and (at press time) is *thisclose* to releasing its fourth iteration, the first commercial version of the game. What makes a game like SPACE EMPIRES IV and its ilk stand out from the rest of the strategy field? It serves up an open-ended stew chock-full of tantalizing options and possibilities, the likes of which you won't find in scripted mission-based games.

All of these titles offer enormous and intricate tech trees, incredible customizability, rich economic systems, the ability to design your own ships, and more. The final version of SPACE EMPIRES IV will sport hundreds of tech levels to research, more than 500 spaceship components, 300-some facilities to build planetside—and the ability to edit them all or even to create your own. I've been playing the limited 100-turn demo (**www.malfador.com**) for a few days now, and even this little taste has me thirsting for the full-blown game. Every one of these titles offers more unique replayability than you'll find in any RTS random skirmish.

In a year that's seen a number of competent, fairly enjoyable, but basically uninspired RTS releases, strategy fans would be well advised to immerse themselves in an old-school galaxy-beater, and perhaps rediscover a depth of strategy and personal satisfaction they might not have realized they were missing. CGW

Maxis Cancels SIMMARS

With the incredible success of THE SIMS, Maxis has decided to cancel the development of SIMMARS, a space colonization simulation. With Will Wright and the Maxis brain trust behind it, SIMMARS seemed a very likely candidate to fill gamers' extraterrestrial Manifest Destiny-fueled fantasies, especially in the wake of the disaster that was the OUTPOST series. Unfortunately, the immense appeal among both casual and hardcore gamers of deciding when and where Bob Newbie will urinate, and whether Bella Goth should or should not have a lesbian love affair behind Mortimer's back, scrubbed the planned launch of the SIM franchise into outer space. With the small-town simulator SIMSVILLE and SIMS ONLINE in full-bore production, Maxis decided their limited resources and staff were best allocated to the expansion of this huge new franchise.

PANZER GENERAL Heads to the Russian Front

When 3D graphics became de rigueur for games, SSI introduced 3D units and terrain to its venerable PANZER GENERAL design. The resulting game, PANZER GENERAL 3D ASSAULT, suffered from interface problems and lost the refined feel of earlier versions. SSI has modified the game to make it easier to control units, added new campaigns, and improved the strategic map with better unit information. The new title, SCORCHED EARTH, is still the same game at heart, but these improvements – along with a new Battle Generator – make it much more worthwhile. If it's been too long since you've lost yourself in a good WWII chess game, reconnoiter this one.

BY THIERRY "Scooter" NGUYEN thierry_nguyen@ziffdavis.com

Plotting Your Destruction

Two Action Game Writers Talk About Their Craft

When you think about great writing in games, action games are probably the last thing to come to mind. Most shooters are content to let their guns do all the talking.

Even so, action games have come a long way since DOOM, in which the entire "story" was a couple lines in the game's READ.ME file. Beginning with SYSTEM SHOCK, and continuing in titles like JEDI KNIGHT and HALF-LIFE, action games have begun to incorporate more narrative into their structure. Some games even feature the work of *real writers*.

Curious about the strange land where words and pixels meet, Inside Action tracked down and cornered two of these writer types: Sheldon Pacotti, scriptwriter for DEUS EX; and Warren Ellis, established comic book writer (*Transmetropolitan, Planetary*), who was brought in to script the upcoming HOSTILE WATERS by Rage Software.

Get in, and Start Typing

Depending on a development team's style, the writer is either a lone wolf or part of a team. Ellis reflected, "They had—and I hope they don't mind me saying this—half an idea. They knew what they wanted to do, and were simply unsure about how to go about doing it. I came in and fleshed their idea out, added a new background, and created a world around their central game notion. They told me what they needed, and got out of the way while I gave it to them. It was a really good working experience." Pacotti offered a different perspective: "Writing for a game is a very team-driven process. In some ways, it's easier than other kinds of writing because the writer is constantly getting outside direction from designers, testers, and the project director."

Ellis scripted HOSTILE WATERS before most of the game was designed, while Pacotti "joined Ion Storm after most of the maps had been built, so the NPCs and overall story were well along." Pacotti described his job as "bringing to life an outline that was already in place," while Ellis said his job was "to create atmosphere, provide information, and build a tone that colors your gameplay. Basically, I worry the shit out of you, and then you go out to blow things up."

Chain Me to a Desk

With some minor differences, actually writing the game is still akin to writing anything else. Ellis describes it as "varied work. You go from deep background material for the visual development, to sweeping plot synopses, to writing short animated sequences, to writing voiceover dialogue." As for the writing process, he says, "I spend all day on this damn computer, hitting it until it spits out stories and thrashing the Net in pursuit of research material."

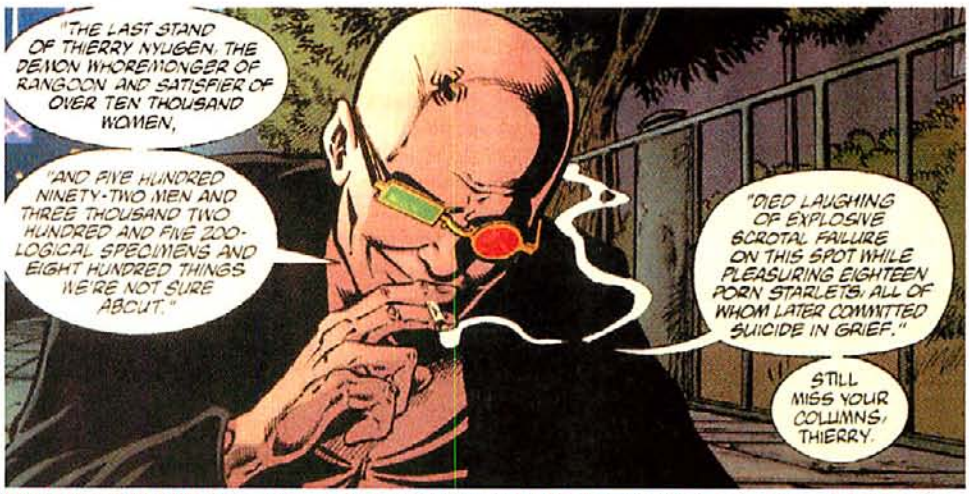
While Pacotti used "ConEdit, a custom editor that integrates logic, goals, inventory, notes, and other functions" to write his dialogue, he shares Ellis' sentiment: "During the rush for alpha, I spent about 14 hours a day staring at nothing but ConEdit."

The Pen of the Future

I asked Ellis which was harder: writing for comics or for games? He answered, "Scripting a comic is still more difficult, because as the writer and creator you are charged with providing the entire experience. In a game, the experience is what happens *between* your story elements." Would he continue to do more game work? "Hell, yes. I enjoyed this immensely."

When I asked Pacotti if he'd do more game-writing, he gave a more forward-looking answer: "I think we've barely scratched the surface of what computers can do in the realm of storytelling. The medium's going to mature over the next ten years, and I'm hopeful that a genre of 'game' will emerge that has the same mass appeal as movies, and can accommodate adult-level character development and drama. I'd like to be in the business when that happens."

So, for all you current or budding writers thinking about breaking into the gaming industry, here're some nuggets to chew on. And if the writers intrigue you, hit **www.warrenellis.com** and **www.sheldonpacotti.com** to learn more about them. CGW



Copyright ©2000 Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson.

SPIDER KNOWS MY NAME Angry, yet humorous British comic book writing from Ellis. No men-in-tights here. Alas, he misspelled my last name.

SCOOTER'S MIX

1. Preacher #66 (the final issue of a great comic book series)
2. ICEWIND DALE
3. SACRIFICE
4. CRIMSON SKIES
5. Neal Stephenson's Cryptonomicon

BY GORDON BERG grognard@concentric.net

All's Well in Flight Simsville

LITTLE TIDBITS OF GOOD NEWS, FOR A CHANGE

■■■ Fellow writer Jeff Lackey rightly pointed out to me that we flight sim nuts have probably never had it so good. Between titles such as COMANCHE VS. HOKUM, MiG ALLEY, EUROPEAN AIR WAR, FALCON 4.0, JANE'S F/A-18, RED BARON 3D, and so on, what more do we need? (And I'd like to note that all of these titles, with the exception of F/A-18, have within them a dynamic campaign in some form or another.) Furthermore, there appear to be some great titles on the horizon, so who cares if the total number of releases each year is dwindling, as long as what eventually comes out is of good quality?

Granted, I'd found myself a tad burnt out and unenthused until recently. Maybe it was because there have been other great games released of late that have competed vociferously for my limited free time. (I'll admit to binges of DIABLO 2, ICEWIND DALE, DEUS EX, and COUNTER-STRIKE, to name but a few.) Sims, however, are notoriously jealous and don't like to share. So what got me excited about committing again to some long-term sim relationships? Upgrades! Nothin' says sim lovin' more than a faster processor, extra RAM, and a new video card. They'll make you dig out every sim you've ever owned to see how much better they play on a new and improved computer. Am I being too shallow?

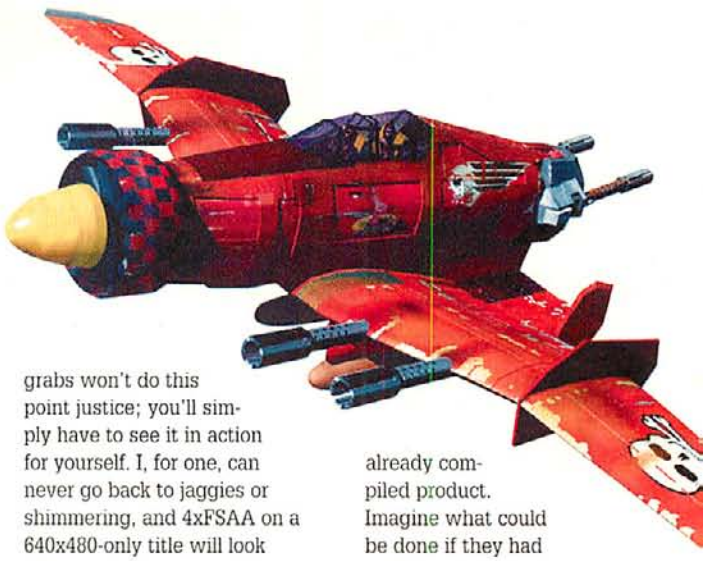
GORDON'S MIX

1. CRIMSON SKIES beta
2. CFS 2 beta
3. AOE2 expansion pack
4. SDOE WWI Plane Pack
5. Started new RB3D and EAW campaigns in 1024x768 w/4xFSAA!

One Vote for 3Dfx

The Voodoo—A Simmer's Paradise?

■■■ Speaking of new video cards, the hottest pieces of hardware among the sim crowd right now are the latest efforts from 3Dfx, and their recent line of Voodoo 3D accelerators. Now, lest you think we're one big happy hive mind here at *CGW*, allow me to be a minor voice of dissent. I take some issue with the conclusions drawn in the August issue about the Voodoo 5500. Yes, it was late to market and, yes, the latest GeForce can sure kick the crap out of a Voodoo when it comes to the QUAKE 3 engine. But what about sims? Squeezing out that few extra frames-per-second isn't as important to a flight or driving sim as it is to a first-person shooter. Where the new Voodoo makes a big difference is in the hardware-implemented Full Scene Anti-Aliasing. Captured screen grabs won't do this point justice; you'll simply have to see it in action for yourself. I, for one, can never go back to jaggies or shimmering, and 4xFSAA on a 640x480-only title will look new again. Be sure to visit **www.papadoc.net/Voodoo_vs_Geforce2.htm** to get a better idea of what I'm talking about.



Microsoft SuckUp 2.0

Hold That Carrier Still!

■■■ It sure has been a great summer to be a press weenie on Microsoft's PR list. While playing with the COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 beta, I've discovered just how much I truly suck. I'm 0-for-20 on attempted traps, and counting. With regards to the CRIMSON SKIES beta I'm playing, I hereby issue the following bold statement: There is something seriously wrong with you if you don't enjoy playing this game (assuming it ships fairly bug-free).

A Patchwork Sim

More FALCON 4.0 User Updates

■■■ The last time I mentioned FALCON 4.0 in this page, we had just seen the first release from the ibeta.com team in the post-Hasbro era. Now, they're up to their third realism patch, and it's amazing what they and the user community-at-large have accomplished with this sim. In fact, it sometimes seems FALCON 4.0 is getting more user-added creations and updates than the Linux OS. And all of this based on hex code altering of an already compiled product. Imagine what could be done if they had access to the actual source code...

You can stop imagining now, because the source code was "leaked" to the Internet. This has sparked quite a few debates on the morality of gaming with patches based on the theft of an intellectual property—a property many consider to have been abandoned by Hasbro. The best example of this dilemma can be found in the work done by the mysterious individual eRAZOR, who has given this sim an unprecedented look and feel with a boost in framerates by converting FALCON 4.0 over to DirectX 7 graphics.

For more information on the FALCON patching madness, check out the incredible work done by Bob "Groucho" Marks and his "F4Plus" articles over at **combatsim.com**. Be sure to look those up if you need help figuring out the proper order of the myriad of enhancements available.

Hope for the Rudderless

Saitek Help

■■■ For the first time I can recall, I'm flying without any CH gear. I'm in love with my new Saitek X36 stick throttle/rudder combo, but it was a rocky start and Saitek's Web site was less than helpful. All I can say is, thank God for Ron Hunt's Saitek USB Help Center, or I would have been completely screwed. Check out **www.saitekhelp.com**. CGW

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

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When the time came to conquer Gaul, he **rounded up his friends** from the 'net.

When they said it couldn't be done, he **instant-messaged** them and told them it would.

And when the broken bodies of their foes lined the streets of their conquest, he got back on the **chat channel** and decreed:

"BOO-YAH!"



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BY T. BYRL BAKER tbyrlbaker@msn.com

STARFLIGHT Rides Again!

RABID FANS CREATING THIRD EPISODE OF CLASSIC SPACE SIM

The first time in my life I experienced pure, seething jealousy was when my best friend's dad bought a new Tandy 1000 and a copy of STARFLIGHT. He wouldn't let us touch his new computer, but just watching him mining hundreds of unique worlds, communicating with strange aliens, and navigating the vast universe stands out as one of my most cherished gaming memories. I still haven't found a game as deep and rewarding as that original effort—including STARFLIGHT II on my Amiga 500. For the last fifteen years, I've been wondering why a third game with upgraded graphics and sounds wasn't released, as the gameplay mechanics were so outstanding that I still play the original to this day.



(above) **MO' BETTER** STARFLIGHT's comms interface looks familiar, but the graphics have taken a turn for the better. ■ (right) **WHO YOU CALLIN' A SPATH?** Our Spathi ship takes a nasty hit in STAR CONTROL: TIMEWARP.

Apparently I'm not the only one who feels that way. A group of talented fans is hard at work on STARFLIGHT III: MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE. The game is looking good, and the team is adding many features that were lacking in the first two installments. If all goes as planned, players will be able to purchase at least three types of ships, pick up special missions and leads at the closest spaceport, and even hire mercenaries to help out in pitched space battles or to slug it out on the ground. Twenty races populate the star map, not including new planet-bound races that haven't developed space-flight technology yet.

The most amazing thing about the STARFLIGHT III project is that several members of the original STARFLIGHT team have given the project their blessing. The SFIII crew doesn't have to worry about copyright violations since Rod McConnell, the owner of Binary Systems (the company that created the original game), gave them permission to use anything they need. Tim Lee and Greg Johnson—who worked for years on the original game—have made themselves available as consultants. Lee has also been providing original design documents and source code to help the SFIII team get over some rough spots. "My motivation for joining the team was to encourage the production of a fun pastime—something that would be fun to make and fun to play," says Lee. "We had to cut so much out of the original STARFLIGHT due to technical limits, and it would be excellent to see those elements realized with today's technology."

Greg Johnson, who went on to co-found ToeJam & Earl Productions, is helping for similar reasons. "It feels really good to see people so devoted to making something that they're willing to give up a huge chunk of their life to build it for the sake of building it; and probably more than anything else, so that they can play it," Johnson told me. "When we originally built STARFLIGHT, we had no end of problems. We went *way* over schedule and the project was almost canned any number of times. The thing that really kept it going was that we just *had* to see it when it was done."

Johnson hopes the support he's lending will eventually help the SFIII team experience the same elation he did when the original project was completed. "I remember saying quite seriously many times, 'I don't care if I die as long as it's after we finish,'" he says. "Beneath all the dollars, and the politics, and the marketing, and the technical headaches, it's really 'the game' that matters—and when you're young and starting out, that can sweep you up and become everything." The team working on SFIII seems imbued with a similar level of passion, and the game should be something special when it finally is finished. You can track its progress at Starport Central, found at **www.geocities.com/Area51/Station/2571.** CGW

T. BYRL'S MIX

1. COMBAT MISSION
2. STAR TREK: VOYAGER ELITE FORCE
3. VIRTUA TENNIS on the Dreamcast
4. Checking out massive amounts of shareware for my new Visor
5. Semper Fi, Mac by Henry Berry

A New STAR CONTROL?!

Let's Do the Time Warp Again

STARFLIGHT isn't the only timeless space classic getting a modern update. Another team has been working on the all-new STAR CONTROL: TIMEWARP for some time now, and a complete melee engine with more than two dozen ships is available for download at the **www.star-control.com/timewarp** site. An adventure game engine will be incorporated later, but until then, you can content yourself with battles against a buddy or the recently-added AI.



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To obtain a winners list, available within 15 days after winners are chosen, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope by December 8, 2000 to: COMPUTER GAMING WORLD/FALCON NORTHWEST CONTEST, 50 Beale Street, 12th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105, attention: Annie Lipscomb. All interpretations of the rules and decisions regarding the winners by Ziff Davis Media are final. Ziff Davis Media reserves the right to change or cancel this contest at any time.

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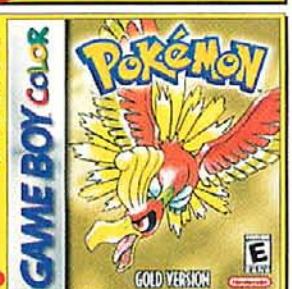
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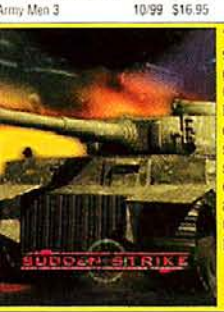
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Sierra (Roleplaying)
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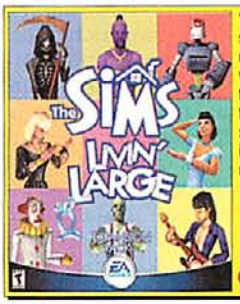
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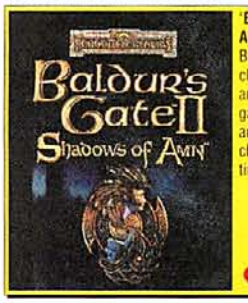
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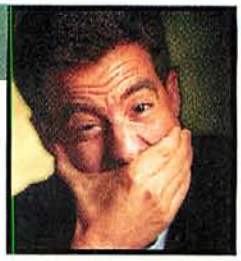
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Activision (Roleplaying)
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Get Stuffed

CGW's talking turkey spreads some holiday cheer

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

I say this to you even though I am writing this in August, and most of you are reading it in October. Am I a retard? Do I not know how to read a calendar? The answers to those questions are no and yes—in that order, I think. But if you look on the cover of this magazine, it quite plainly says "November 2000." Thus, no matter what is actually happening in reality, Ziff-Davis Media says that it's November, and since that fine organization helps me put food on my family's table a good two to three times a week, it is imperative that I go along with the charade. They also recently told me that 2+2=5, by the way, and I am here to tell you that that does in fact make a lot of sense to me. Yes, sir.

■ ■ ■

So to get into that holiday spirit, I thought this would be a good opportunity to, well, to give thanks. Like those noble pilgrims back in 1621 who gathered around tables to share food and smoke peace pipes with the Injuns before screwing them out of their land, I sit before you now in celebration. Yes, friends, the gaming world can be a cantankerous one. We bicker, we cajole, we complain. At times it seems that we're never happy. So I say, let's put all of that aside for now. Let's join hands as friends, bow our heads, and speak of the good times. Let us give thanks where thanks are due.

I am thankful, first of all, to gaze upon the PC Data Top 10 list and not find any hunting games. Regis is still there, but Regis will probably still be here after the apocalypse, along with the cockroaches, so what are you gonna do?

I am thankful that DAIKATANA, our Long National Nightmare, is finally over and behind us—and that John Romero and Ion Storm and all the rest of us can move on to bigger and better things. Yikes.

I am thankful for THE SIMS and ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON—two incredibly fun games that I could actually show to my six-year-old kid without feeling like an irresponsible social deviant. They made for nice breaks between our family sessions of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE and KINGPIN.

I am thankful for EA Sports' CRICKET 2000, which confirmed my suspicions that cricket is, in fact, the stupidest game ever invented.

I am thankful for Old Man Murray (**www.oldmanmurray.com**), consistently the funniest, smartest gaming site on the Web. They tell it like it is and don't give a damn what anybody thinks. Game publishers fear them and hate them—and that's all you need to know.

While I'm at it, I'm also thankful for Blue's News (**www.bluesnews.com**), Gone Gold (**www.gonegold.com**) all the GameSpy "planet" sites, Evil Avatar (**www.evilavatar.com**), and the many other gaming sites too numerous to mention who work their butts off to keep the gaming citizenry informed on a daily—often hourly—basis.

I am thankful that it is not my job to look at *Star Trek* games when they are brought into the *CGW* office.

I am thankful for Bethesda, Big Time Software (COMBAT MISSION), and all of the other smaller, independent gaming houses keeping the faith amidst difficult odds.

I am thankful for all the women who participate in this business despite the incessant misogyny and embarrassingly immature boys club attitude. I'm especially thankful for all the hot-looking ones who show up at our office in tight pants.

I am thankful for all the cranky folks on Usenet, who keep us humble every single day by reminding us that we suck.

I am thankful for the brown sugar/cinnamon Pop Tarts in our vending machine, without which my life would be a brimming trough of despair.

I am thankful for the following games, which have all personally enslaved me this year: SYSTEM SHOCK 2, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, DIABLO 2, ICEWIND DALE, MDK2, MONKEY ISLAND (for the third time), and SHOGUN (the current obsession).

I am thankful for LucasArts, for bringing the MONKEY ISLAND series—my favorite games ever—back one more time. Sorry about all that "adventure game is dead" stuff. I was just bitter.

I am thankful for all the smart, patient PR personnel who put up with a neverending stream of BS from both the gaming press and the developers they represent. You think their job is easy? Here's an exercise for you, then: Try writing a positive press release for MESSIAH.

I am thankful for all the cranky, outspoken folks on the Usenet gaming forums, who keep us humble every single day by constantly reminding us that we suck.

I am thankful for Napster, for introducing me to all sorts of cool music at the office which I then went out to buy at my local record shop—dammit.

And finally, I am thankful, once again, for the great Johnny Wilson, who many years ago rescued me from a hellish job in the real world, editing reviews of networking routers and modems (for the Mac, no less), and gave me sanctuary here at *Computer Gaming World*. Please don't ever make me go out there again.

Jeff would like it known that he doesn't really hate cricket. Just English people in general. Send your royalist hate mail to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com, and God Bless America!

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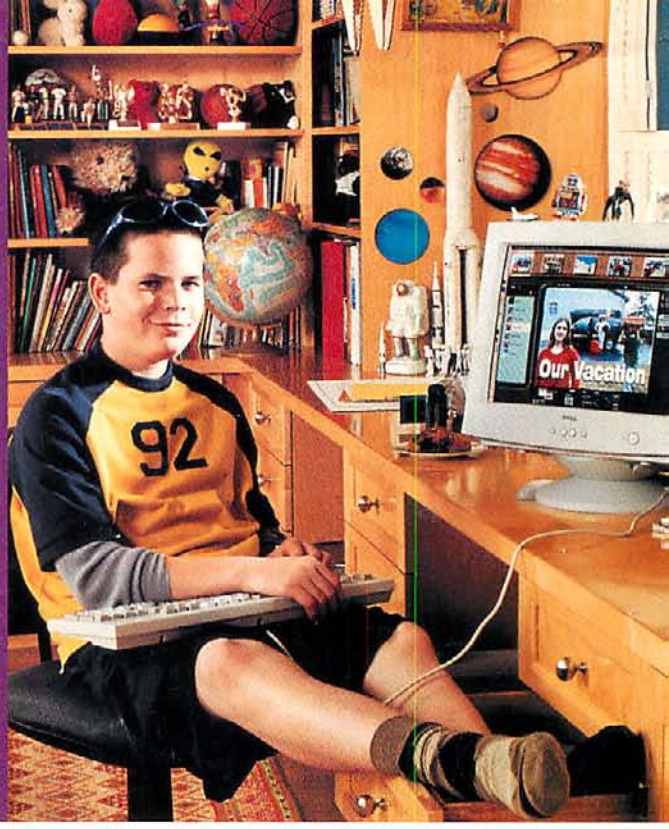
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